AMBEDKAR’S INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIONS: DALIT POINT OF VIEW

Dr. N.K. Singh

Ambedkar interpreted the basic tenets of religions from the dalit viewpoint of the prevailing socio-cultural situation in India. He saw religion not as a means to spiritual salvation of individual souls, but as a ‘social doctrine’ for establishing the righteous relations between man and man. His philosophy of religion does not mean either theology or religion. Theology studies the nature, attributes and functions of God; whereas religion deals with things divine. Theology and religion may be linked together; but they are not philosophies. When we talk of philosophy of religion, it is taken as a critical estimate of the existing religions in general, and in particular to evaluate the teachings and doctrines of each religion, whether it be Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, in relation to man and society, because, as I think, a religion, ignoring the empirical needs of either man or of society, does not come up to the expectations of an intellectual like Ambedkar.

Before I venture to come to the main subject, I would like to bring to your notice the fundamental differences between philosophy, religion, theology and philosophy of religion. The elucidation of these terms, I hope, would help you to understand Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion. You may believe it or not, the text of this article, I wonder, would make you plunge in some sort of amazement to the extent to which you would not have thought of it. Let me now proceed to analyse.

Philosophy: Philosophy has been explained in various ways, however, it is difficult to define it. At the most, it may be described
as the ‘synoptic view of things’ as Plato saw it long ago. Prof. Pringle Pattison wrote:

“It is an attempt to see things—to keep all the main features of the world in view, and to grasp them in their relation to one another as parts of one whole”.¹

Philosophy explains the nature of the universe and man’s positions and prospects in it. For Karl Marx, the main object of Philosophy is not only to explain ‘the nature of the world, but also to change it’, and to Ambedkar, ‘Philosophy is nothing but a standard to measure the conduct of man’.² He also took philosophy as ‘human experience’, which studies and explains the world-process and the world-ground with regard to man, and thus, he agreed with Prof. Pringle Pattison when he said that

“philosophy is an analysis and interpretation of the experience in question in its bearing upon our view of man and the world in which he lives”.³

In a nutshell, philosophy is an evaluation of human conduct and experience so as to make man’s life worth-living in the spheres of empirical nature.

Religion: Religion, too, has been explained in various ways; and like philosophy, it is difficult to define religion. However, it may be described as “man’s faith in a power beyond himself”, or “a belief in an Everlasting God”, who manages the affairs in the world, and gives reward or punishment to human beings according to their acts (karmas). It is also said to be “a fantastic reflection in people’s minds of external forces dominating over them in every day life, a reflection in which earthly forces assume non-earthly forms.”⁴

Ambedkar took “Religion to mean 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”.⁵ Prof. Bettany has defined “religion broadly is man’s attitude produced on his conduct or on his relations to fellow-men”.⁶ In brief, religion, as assumed to be emanated from ‘divine authority’, has become a

April 2003
social force embedded in institutions of worship prayers, rituals and ceremonies of sacred and infallible nature.

_Theology:_ Theology is not religion as such, but a subject which signifies “a discourse or doctrine concerning divine things”. “It is now generally understood to mean the system of doctrines which concern the person, attributes and works of God”. It is, however, related to religion as Ambedkar saw it. Although there are different kinds of theology such as mythical theology, civil theology, natural theology, revealed theology; yet in Ambedkar’s view, theology stands for three fundamental ideas, namely:

(i) “The existence of God;
(ii) God’s providential government of the universe; and
(iii) God’s moral government of mankind”.

_Philosophy of Religion_ 

It may be asserted that philosophy of religion is neither philosophy nor is it religion or theology. The philosophy of religion is something different from them. It involves the language which is related to religious discussion, religious thinking, which may also be anti-religion. Philosophy of religion is not a religious experience, nor is it connected with any faith, worship and ritualism. It is an examination of what religion or theology stands for like the belief in the existence of God, life beyond the empirical world, rituals and ceremonies emerged in the long process of social development, divine authority over moral standards, infallibility of sacred book, immortality of soul and its transmigration. Philosophy of religion is not an appendage to any religion. It is an evaluation of religious life of a particular community in view of the existing conditions of man and society. Philosophy of religion, in fact, involves a ‘critical reason’ with regard to the presuppositions, ideals and practices, rituals and behaviour-patterns of the existing religions. While evaluating them, it sees human interest at large. The main subject of philosophy of religion is an examination of the relevance of a particular religions’ social and moral norms.
Here it may be emphasised that Ambedkar took the work ‘philosophy’ in its two-fold original sense, that is—it meant teachings as it did when people spoke of the philosophy of Socrates or the philosophy of Plato, and in another sense it meant critical reason used in passing judgments upon things and events. On this basis, he said,

“philosophy of Religion is to me not merely a descriptive science. I regard it as being both descriptive as well as normative. In so far as it deals with the teachings of a Religion, philosophy of Religion becomes a descriptive science. In so far as it involves the use of critical reason for passing judgments on those teachings, the philosophy of religion becomes a normative science”.9

According to Ambedkar, the philosophy of religion involves the determination of three dimensions, the first being religion to mean theology, both of which deal with the highest meta-physical abstractions and divine revelations. The second dimension of the philosophy of religion is to know the ideal scheme for which a religion stands and justifies it. The third dimension of the philosophy of religion is to adopt the criterion for judging the value of the ideal scheme of divine governance. From time to time, a religion must be put on its trial. “By what criterion shall it be judged?”. 

The criterion, for him, was some sort of revolution which took place in the field of science, philosophy of religion. In fact, a revolution could change the authority and contents of a relation. The revolutions of scientific nature during the Middle Ages diminished the divinity of religion and the authority of church. There was a time when religion had covered almost the entire field of knowledge such as Biology, Psychology, Geology and Medicine. Religion claimed infallibility over whatever it taught. But bit by bit, the vast empire of religion was destroyed because of religious revolution that had taken place in the history of some religions. For examples, the Copernicas Revolution freed Astronomy from the domination of religions and the Darwinian Revolution freed Biology and Geology from the trammels of religion.

April 2003

Dr. N.K. Singh
A religious revolution at times becomes a great blessing, for it establishes ‘freedom of thought’, and it enables society to assume control of itself dispelling most of the fears and superstitions that people used to face earlier. From among the revolutions of various kinds, Ambedkar considered ‘Religious Revolution’ to be the most significant and immense one, because

“that revolution touches to nature and content of ruling conceptions of the relations of God to man, of society to man and of man to man... that it has brought about a complete transformation in the nature of religions as it is to be taken by savage society and by civilised society although very few seem to be aware of it”.

In other words, the religious revolution results in far-reaching changes, because it is always a revolution in the norms of the socio-moral life of the people as Ambedkar considered it to be.

Now let us come exactly to the main subject, namely: what does Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion encompass in its study and how does it examine all that through the means of ‘critical reason’? Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion, in my opinion, encompasses and examines the following ideas:

(i) That all religions are true and equally good;
(ii) That God is an essential element of a religion;
(iii) That religion must necessarily nourish a scheme of divine governance, an ideal for society to follow;
(iv) That infallibility of religious books as divine authority must be maintained;
(v) That the sole aim of an individual’s life is the salvation of soul (Moksha);
(vi) That the relation of morality to God and religion is necessary;
(vii) That the tests of justice and social utility to judge the relevance of a religion must be applied; and
(viii) That whether or not a religion should be based on rules or principles.
Now to begin with an exposition of the above points in the light of Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion:

**Are All the Religions True and Equally Good?**

The idea that all religions are true and equally good and there was an essential unity among them, was expounded by orthodox philosophers like Dr. Bhagwan Dass, an author of the *Essential Unity of all Religions*. But to Ambedkar, it was positively and demonstratively a wrong belief. The study of comparative religions had broken the claim and arrogance of revealed religions as being the only true and good religions. He observed:

“While it is true that comparative religion had abrogated the capricious distinction between true and false religions based on purely arbitrary and a priori considerations, it has brought in its wake some false notions about religion. The harmful one, is the one I have mentioned, namely, that all religions are equally good and that there is no necessity of discriminating between them. Nothing can be a greater error than this religion is an institution or an influence like all social influences and institutions it may help or it may harm a society which is in its grip.”

This view may well be supported by the results each religion has produced in its social and national life. A religion can form or disrupt nations, create inhuman institutions and barbarous customs, cause wars, prosecutions, rebellions and revolutions; but it can also bring freedom, peace and happiness to millions of people. A religion may be foe to progress, science and art; but also a friend to innovation and good civilisation or cultural heritage. All this can be testified after reading the histories of world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity as to what extent they have done good or harm to the mankind. One may agree or not with what Prof. Bertrand Russel had observed:

“All religions are not only untrue but also harmful”; yet there is some iota of fact in this assertion.

According to Ambedkar, religions could produce strange contradictory results. How can, then, they be true and equally

*April 2003*
good? Every religion has given its own divine scheme of social governance and moral ideals which have produced different models of conduct. The study of comparative religion has not given any heed to this aspect of religions. Moreover, all religions are not theistic; some are non-theistic; and with regard to the nature of soul, God, worship, prayer, rituals and ceremonies, there are basic differences between religions. Although religions are many; but to say they are equally true and good, is the most pernicious idea, and that is why Ambedkar did not entertain it in his philosophy of religion.

Theistic Concept of God

It is generally held by theistic religions that God is an essential element of a religion; but to Ambedkar, it is not. In his view, the religion of the savage society had no idea of God, i.e., in the savage society there was religion without God. How, then, God became fused in religion? He observed:

“It may be that the idea of God had its origin in the worship of the Great man in society, the Hero giving rise to theism—with its faith in its living God. It may be that the idea of God came into existence as result of the purely philosophical speculation upon the problem as to who created life—giving rise to Deism—with its God as Architect of the Universe. In any case, the idea of God is not integral to Religion.”12

A religious revolution is of two kinds—internal and external. The internal religious revolution brings some changes in religion itself; but the external religious revolution is not really a religious revolution. It is, in fact, a revolution in science against the extra-territorial jurisdiction assumed by religion over a field which did not belong to it. However, the revolutions like the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution alter, amend and reconstitute the scheme of ‘divine governance’. The internal religious revolution from time to time brings some fundamental changes in the structural and functional areas of religions. Ambedkar declared:

“By this Revolution God has ceased to be a member of a community... man has ceased to be a blind worshipper of God
doing nothing but obeying his commands... By this Revolution God has ceased to be the mere protector of Society and social interests in gross have ceased to be the centre of the divine order. Society and man have changed places as centres of this divine order. It is man who has become the centre of it.”

The religious revolutions as brought about by Mahavira and Buddha influenced people’s minds far and wide in India and elsewhere, and it was emphasised that the belief in Ishwara (God) was not essentially an integral part of their religion. Ambedkar took this view as true in the form of the Buddha’s Dhamma, because nobody had seen God, God was unknown, a mere metaphysical speculation. Nobody could prove that God had created the Universe, though it was generally held to be true. The Universe had evolved, and was not created by any God or Cosmic Being. The belief in God had only ended in creating superstitions and therefore, for Ambedkar, a religion, if based on God, was not worth-having for man.

**Divine Scheme of Social Governance**

A religion generally prescribes a divine scheme of social governance as we find in Vedic religion or what it was later on called as Hinduism. It gave us the divine social order in the form of Varna-Vyavastha consisting of four major Castes—the Brahmmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. It was created by Prajapati, God of the world, for the well-being of mankind. Such a scheme became an ideal for society to follow. Although it was non-existent, yet it was real, divinely ordained as claimed by the so-called sacred books of Hinduism.

Ambedkar did not accept the divine social governance under the Chaturya-Varna, because in it, there was no choice of free avocation, no economic independence and no economic security. It had developed a hierarchical order of different castes resulting in inequalities of severe nature. In fact, this order devitalised men, particularly the Shudras. It was a process of sterilisation. It denied wealth, education and arms to its people. It did not fulfil the test
of social utility. This divine social governance dissected society in fragments, dissociated work from interest, disconnected intelligence from labour, expropriated the rights of man to interests vital to life. It also prevented society from mobilising resources for common action in the hour of danger. Can it satisfy the test of social utility?, asked Ambedkar. No, not at all. Therefore, he rejected the divine social order (Chaturya-Varna) on the basis of its denial of liberty, equality and fraternity.\textsuperscript{15}

The idea of infallibility of religious texts as the source of divine authority was also rejected by Ambedkar on the ground that it prevented people from using the method of free inquiry and examination of the efficacy of religious beliefs and practices. When Ambedkar saw that the Hindus under the sanctions of Varna System hesitated in matters of inter-dining and inter-caste marriages, he found its main reason in the infallibility of the Hindu Shastras. For the Shastras prescribed such rules as to prevent the Hindus from inter-dining and inter-caste marriages. The people were afraid of divine wrath if they tried to override the divinity and sanctity of the Shastras. The infallibility of the Shastras did not permit the use of critical reason in social matters. Therefore, Ambedkar emphasised,

“The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras...... Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry....”\textsuperscript{16}

In other words, for Ambedkar, nothing was infallible, and everything must be subject to examination or to critical reason, even the Vedas on the point of authority and divinity were not final to him. It was really a riddle how the Vedas or the Hindu Shastras were considered and declared to be ‘Infallible’.

The Salvation of the Soul

It is generally accepted in theistic religions like Hinduism that the sole aim of an individual’s life is to attain Moksha, i.e.,
the salvation of the soul. Did Ambedkar believe in this thesis? No, he did not believe in it, because, as Buddhist, he ruled out the existence of any ‘Eternal Soul’, the main doctrine of Hinduism. The idea is that the eternal soul goes from life to life because of its Karmas. The soul transmigrates from one birth to another till attains Moksha. The triangular theory of soul, Karma and transmigration, has become the main thesis of Hinduism. Ambedkar did not accept this view, because he believed in the theory of ‘anatta’ (no Soul) of Buddhism. Everything is impermanent. How can there be permanent soul then? Moreover, the Hindu idea of soul is based on the retributive theory of Karma, which he rejected as an iniquitous doctrine. The only purpose of the Retributive Theory of Karma as propounded by the Hindu Shastras was to enable the state or the society to escape responsibility for the bad condition of the poor and the lowly. How could Ambedkar believe in such an inhuman and absurd doctrine while having faith in the test of justice for religion?

Ambedkar rejected the metaphysical entities like soul and its transmigration.

Agreeing with the Buddhist analysis, Ambedkar believed in human mind which is quite different from the soul. Mind functions but soul does not function. The belief in eternal soul is unprofitable, and it only ends in creating superstitions. The entire structure of Brahmani religion is based on Atman, which Ambedkar rejected as unknown and unseen. The belief in the permanent soul did not satisfy the intellect of Ambedkar. Since, for him, God is not an essential element of a religion, so is the case with the soul. Therefore, the question did not arise that an individual’s aim of life must be to seek the salvation of soul through the grace of God, as some Indian philosophers like Ramanujam and others thought.

**Relation of Morality to God and Religion**

With regard to the relation of morality to God and religion, Ambedkar had his own view, and he did not agree with the idea
that morality was an outcome of the belief in God or it was an
integral part of religion. According to him, though the relation
between God and morality was not quite integral, the relation
between religion and morality was as a matter of truth; morality
has no place in religion, because today religion in general has
come to connect nothing but belief in God, belief in soul, worship
of God, curing of erring soul, propitiating God by prayers,
ceremonies, sacrifices etc. In fact, morality in theistic religions is
not effective, for the main things in them are the prayers, worship,
routines, ceremonies and sacrifices. From another viewpoint, as
Ambedkar observed:

“Both religion and morality are connected with the same elemental
facts of human existence—namely life, death, birth and marriage.
Religion concentrates these life processes while morality furnishes
rules for their preservation. Religion in consecrating the elemental
facts and processes of life came to consecrate also the rules laid
down by society for their preservation. Looked at from this point,
it is easily explained why the bond between Religion and Morality
took place. It was more intimate and more natural than the bond
between Religion and God.”

In Ambedkar’s view, morality comes in the only wherein
man comes in relation to man, and if a religion does not believe in
the existence of God, morality takes its place as we see in the
Buddha’s Dhamma. In Dhamma, there is no place for 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 for man to love man. It
does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that
man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love
man. It is evident that Ambedkar linked no-theistic religion like
Buddhism with morality as an integral part of it. In his view, every
theistic religion preaches morality; but morality is not the root of
it. It only teaches to be good to your neighbour, because you are
both children of God or the men of Allah or Ishwara.
Ambedkar’s Interpretation of Hindu Philosophy of Religion

In Ambedkar’s interpretation, Hindu philosophy served—neither social utility nor justice for the individual. But he began his critique of Hinduism saying that the Hindu was not prepared to face inquiry. ‘He either argues that religion is no importance or he takes shelter behind the view—fostered by the study of comparative religion—that all religions are good.’ Ambedkar said, both these views were mistaken and untenable. Firstly, religion was a social force. Those who denied the importance of religion failed to realise how great was the potency and sanction that lay behind a religious ideal, as compared with a purely secular ideal. A religious ideal had a hold on mankind which transcended considerations of earthly gain. This could not be said of a purely secular ideal. Therefore, to ignore religion was to ignore a live wire. Secondly, to argue that all religions were good was, according to Ambedkar, a false notion. Everything depended upon what social ideal a given religion held out as a divine scheme of governance.

As far as Hinduism is concerned his whole discussion is a diatribe against its denial of the concepts of individual dignity and justice. Quoting extensively from the Manusmriti, Ambedkar showed that social and religious inequality were deep-rooted in Hinduism. Manu did not stop at a non-recognition of individual human worth, he advocated a debasement of it. This, Ambedkar said, was clear from Manu’s explanation of the origin of various castes and his condemnation of even the innocent practice of a low-caste child being given high-sounding names. Hinduism, he said, did not recognise human liberty, since there could be no liberty without social equality, economic security or access to knowledge, all of which Hinduism was opposed to. Hinduism did not even recognise fraternity—though it said that the divine spirit dwelt in all human beings—because fraternity could only be born of fellow-feeling and Hinduism with its unending process of splitting social life into smaller and smaller community-based fragments and its emphasis on a secular as well as religious hierarchy, discouraged the emergence of fellow-feeling.
He concluded his analysis saying that on the criterion of ‘justice’ Hinduism was found wanting, in so far as it was inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity. Thus, if Hinduism were to lay a claim to ‘justice’, it could only be in the purely legal not moral sense. For, in the legal sense, whatever was in conformity with law was just. In the moral sense, justice involved a recognition of human equality. So far as Hinduism was concerned:

“Inequality is the Soul of Hinduism. The morality of Hinduism is only social. It is immoral and inhuman to say the least.” 21

Ambedkar then examined whether Hinduism served the interest of utility—if not of justice. Again, he concluded in the negative. Caste in Hinduism dissociated work from interest by making occupation hereditary. It disconnected intelligence from manual labour by denying the labourer access to knowledge. It denied him the right to cultivate vital interests and, in the modern context, caste obstructed the mobilisation of workers. He concluded that caste was not merely a division of labour but also of labourers.22

Since Ambedkar’s discussion up to this point was based primarily on the Manusmriti, it could be said that his conclusions were based on Hindu law rather than Hindu philosophy. Ambedkar prompted this contention, saying that in Hinduism there was no distinction between legal and moral philosophy. Hindu morality did not stand at the level of individual conscience, and in this sense a Hindu was a ‘social’ but not a ‘moral’ being. He admitted that he had not discussed the Upanishads, but argued that while the Upanishads might contain Hindu philosophy, the latter had no link with Hindu religion. His examination was focused primarily on the philosophy of Hindu religion. But even in Upanishadic philosophy, Ambedkar found nothing to recommend. Following Thomas Huxley, he condemned it as a philosophy of withdrawal from the struggle for existence. He also quoted Lala Hardayal in support of his criticism of Upanishadic philosophy.23

The points of departure for almost all of Ambedkar’s writings on religion, philosophy or society are the values of individual
freedom, social equality and fraternity. These are the values which, with the addition of rationality, form the core of the liberal value framework. Ambedkar subscribed to it whole-heartedly. While, as a leader of the untouchables, he quite naturally returned again and again to the problems surrounding the achievement of equality, his concern for individual freedom and fraternity was equally strong. His criticism that the Hindu had no ‘conscience’ may seem harsh, but within the context of his discussion he was making a specific point, viz., that the Hindu was brought up more to conform to his caste practice than to face problems of individual conscience. In his undelivered address to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore (1936), Ambedkar had said:

“To put it in plain language, what Hindus call Religion is really Law or at best legalised class-ethics. Frankly, I refuse to call this code of ordinances, as Religion.”

He felt that it deprived moral life of freedom and spontaneity and reduce it to conformity or externally imposed rules. He wanted such a religion to be abolished.

Yet, Ambedkar said that there was a perennial need for religion. He agreed with Edmund Burke that true religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true civil government rests. Traditionally defined practice, and conformity to it, seemed to signify righteous conduct to a Hindu. Caste, he said, mediated simultaneously on issues of religious-moral correctness and secular justice. To that extent the individual who conformed to his caste behaviour escaped questions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. The problem however is that ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ cannot be decided except with reference to a given value framework. Ambedkar’s critique that individual freedom and equality were not the values on which the Hindu social order was based is valid. When, therefore, one examines a given system of deciding ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in the light of a different, a newer system of values, the inadequacy of the premises on which the earlier practices were based becomes obvious.

This was in fact what had become evident to all the other social and religious reformers of the nineteenth century, beginning 

April 2003
with Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Phule, Renade, Bhandarkar and others. But they had limited success in their endeavours, limited primarily to the urban middle class and among them again limited to the level of ratiocination, and not extended to practice. What Ambedkar wanted was clear. To his audience in Lahore he had planned to say:

“Whether you do or do not [follow my suggestions for reform] you must give a new doctrinal basis to your Religion—a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short, Democracy”.25

Ambedkar felt that it was this indifference and absence of a genuine morality that often passed off as a Hindu’s capacity for tolerance. He had, in his address, listed four points which according to him needed earnest consideration by the Hindus:

1. Hindus must decide whether or not to adopt a new morality which would be practised universally within the nation, because the type of morality a nation adopted was critically important for its survival.

2. Hindus must decide what part of their heritage was worth preserving and what part needed to be given up. The fact of its having survived over the ages was no guarantee that a practice was healthy for society.

3. They must stop looking upon the past as a supplier of ideas for the present.

4. They must accept that nothing is permanent, nothing sanatan.

In brief Ambedkar wanted that Hindus should adopt reason-based moral principles, applicable to all segments of society, and consistent with the needs and dominant values of the present. In his mind, justifiably, caste was equated with Hindu religion, and he considered caste not only an anachronism but unjust and therefore unethical. To Ambedkar, religion should above all be a set of moral principles that would sustain society. Caste did not provide these principles. In fact, it negated them in every way. In
his emphasis on the role of moral values—as different from spiritual values—one sees what made Buddhism a natural choice for him at a later stage.

It may be argued that the picture that Ambedkar painted of a morally insensitive, rule-bound, stultified Hindu society was an exaggeration, and that through the dialogues in the *Upanishads*, the tales of the epics, the teachings of saints, the values attached to truthfulness, kindliness and fair play which were considered essential for one’s spiritual progress through successive births, Hinduism did seek to keep alive a native and spontaneous sense of morality. Brought up as he was on the teachings of Kabir, Ambedkar might not have totally denied this, but his point was that even the practice of morality was caste bound. The individual accepted the obligation to abide by these universal moral norms only for interaction *within* his caste, but not equally *between* castes. In fact he quotes chapter and verse from the scriptures to show how the acceptance of moral, as different from legal, obligation was often limited to caste strata which led to the fragmentation of society. Hindu society was an amalgam of castes, which stood in a hierarchical relationship to one another and did not really form a unified, and cohesive society.

Ambedkar was not against the existence of groups in society, but he was against the exclusivism of groups. A society is not to be condemned as a body because there are groups in it. It is to be condemned if the groups are isolated, each leading an exclusive life of its own. Because it is this isolation which produces the anti-social spirit which makes co-operative effort so impossible of achievement.26

Ambedkar held Brahmanism responsible for this state of Hindu society, and since according to him Hinduism was but Brahmanism, he found little that was defensible or praiseworthy in it. As Rege points out, Ambedkar was more radical than earlier reformers. Instead of seeking to reform Hinduism, he rejected it. Rege argues

*April 2003*
that Ambedkar rejected ‘religion’ itself and sought to replace it by Dhamma. He explains ‘Dhamma is morality conceived as sacred and universal’. In this sense, Ambedkar’s concept of morality was different from morality as preached in most religions. Ambedkar considered such a universal morality scared, in the sense of being inviolable.

For Ambedkar, religion came to have a specific meaning. In a speech delivered in Bombay (1955) on the foundation of Buddhism, he said that which promises equal opportunity to all is the true religion. The rest are all false religions.27 Later, in the same lecture, he quoted Buddha’s advice to his followers. After me religion itself will be your law-giver. If you do not observe religion what use of is it? Religion accepted in the purity of mind will be your law.’ For Ambedkar, religion had significance only in so far as it helped to establish a moral order characterised by equality, freedom and fraternity. And he was categorical that Buddhism alone could create a climate favourable to Human equality.28

On the issue of a belief in the transcendental, it would appear that there was possibly a certain change in Ambedkar’s thinking between the 1930s and the 1950s. In a speech delivered on 4 March, 1933 in Bombay, he had said to his audience,

“You have no reason to worry about whether or not there is a God in this world. On the other hand, it is certain that all events that transpire are the result of human action.”29

When he used the word ‘spiritual’ as he did in his 1936 speech at the Mahar conference, he was not referring to any transcendental experience or transcendental reality. He said that just as there were material reasons for his wanting to convert out of Hinduism, there were also ‘spiritual’ reasons. The spiritual reason that he gave were his dissatisfaction with the kind of society that Hindu religion sustained. It was not a religion that helped an individual seek the growth of his potential. He also spoke of the
fact that Hinduism did not teach one compassion, equality among human beings or respect for individual freedom.

While Ambedkar rejected Hinduism, it would not be true to say that he rejected religion itself. In fact, in his essay on the philosophy of Hinduism, he insisted:

“... Religion is a social force. As I have pointed out religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for society to follow. The ideal may be non-existent in the sense that it is something which is constructed. But although non-existent, it is real. For an ideal it has full operative force which is inherent in every ideal. Those who deny the importance of religion not only forget this, they also forget to realise how great is the potency and sanction that lies behind a religious ideal as compared with that of a purely secular ideal.... A religious ideal has a hold on mankind, irrespective of an earthly gain. This can never be said of a purely secular ideal.... A religious ideal never fails to work so long as there is faith in that ideal....”

This underlines simultaneously the significance that Ambedkar attached to a religion-inspired moral order and in the context of his rejection of Hinduism—the legitimacy of his desire to belong to a religion that incorporated the moral values that he cherished.

**Ambedkar Approach to Buddhist Philosophy of Religion**

Having detailed what it was that Ambedkar rejected when he decided to abandon Hinduism, it is necessary now to examine in some detail what it was about Buddhism that attracted him and the process by which he came to his final decision. It would also be necessary to understand his particular perception of the Buddhist message. His first contact with Buddhism was probably through his reading of Keluskar’s biography of Gautam Buddha, which the author presented him when he successfully completed high school in 1908. If the book left any deep impress on Ambedkar, it lay dormant for many a long year. Even after he announced his resolve to abandon Hinduism in 1936, he did not opt right away in favour of Buddhism. Even in the presidential address that he had prepared for the Lahore conference convened by the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal,
he only repeated his resolve to leave Hinduism but gave no indication of the faith which he wished to embrace. There was much commotion caused among the organisers of the conference by Ambedkar’s announcement, and Ambedkar’s decision not to deliver the presidential address was a result of the efforts made by the organisers to persuade him to delete a reference to his decision to abandon Hinduism. Following the announcement, representatives of different faiths publicly or privately invited Ambedkar to embrace their faith.

The obvious choices before Ambedkar were Sikhism, Christianity and Islam. Of these, it would appear that Islam was not considered seriously at any stage. One important reason for this could have been that by choosing Islam in the changed atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim communal tension, Ambedkar would have invited even greater hostility from the Hindus towards himself and his followers. This is only conjecture and there is no specific comment by Ambedkar to suggest this. Actually, when Ambedkar announced his resolve to leave Hinduism in 1936, there were Muslim as well as Sikh observers present at the meeting. But as regards Islam and Christianity Ambedkar seems to have had the feeling that both these religions practised a caste system of their own. With regard to Christianity he also had the complaint that the Church had not been able to further the interests of its depressed class converts in any substantial manner.

Of the three—Sikhism, Christianity and Islam—only Sikhism was seriously considered for adoption. Ambedkar sent his son and nephew to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. He also sent another group of thirteen young men to study Sikhism. He had discussions with Dr. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha on the choice of Sikhism. But he seems to have given up the idea of opting for Sikhism, sometime after his return from London. Keer mentions this in his biography of Ambedkar but gives no date or year. It would appear though that this must have been after one of his visits to London in the mid-1930s.
The formal declaration of the decision to embrace Buddhism came in May 1950, and in the same year he gave a talk at the Young Buddhists Conference in Colombo on the rise and fall of Buddhism. Obviously the decision could not have been sudden, and one would assume that he had been reading on Buddhism for at least a few years. The factor that would have weighed against the choice of Buddhism must have been primarily that Buddhism had very little following left in India, though it was the land of its birth. Conversion to Buddhism would mean that it would get identified as the religion of the erstwhile untouchables and, to that extent, would reinforce their social isolation. For, there is no doubt that Ambedkar was not thinking of conversion only for himself. He was conceiving of it as an act in which a substantial number of his followers would join him. The choice of Buddhism would mean the loss of any marginal gain that might have resulted from increasing the relative size of one of the existing minorities. At the same time, Ambedkar was equally certain that the adopting of Buddhism as their religion was likely to meet with the least opposition from the Hindu majority.

A reference to these social and political factors need not mean that Ambedkar gave them the greatest weight in his choice. As he said in several of his speeches, it was the social, moral and spiritual message of Buddhism that had attracted him. But, being a leader of the people, Ambedkar was hardly in a position to make a purely personal choice in this important matter without considering what it would mean for his followers. It was a combination of these considerations that must have finally made him decide in favour of Buddhism.

Raghuvanshi in his collection of Ambedkar’s speeches has reproduced a speech which is most definitive of Ambedkar’s position on conversion to Buddhism.\footnote{Unfortunately, Raghuvanshi has mentioned neither the date nor the place where the speech was delivered. Since it is a speech addressed to the Mahars, it must have been delivered in Bombay. And since it contains a reference to the law as adopted in 1950, whereby a person changing his religion to Buddhism must give reasons to the Court, it must have been delivered in early 1950.} Unfortunately, Raghuvanshi has mentioned neither the date nor the place where the speech was delivered. Since it is a speech addressed to the Mahars, it must have been delivered in Bombay. And since it contains a reference to the law as adopted in 1950, whereby a person changing his
religion does not thereby cease to enjoy or lose his rights of inheritance or property, it must have been delivered in or after 1950. The importance of speech lies in that it makes a stout defence of Ambedkar’s decision to convert to another religion, gives the reasons for his dissatisfaction with Hinduism, speaks reverentially of the Buddha and advises his followers to surrender to their own judgment in this important matter. But the speech does not contain any categorical statement that he had decided upon Buddhism as the religion of his choice.

It is amply clear that what attracted Ambedkar to Buddhism was its message of equality and fraternity, its respect for the human being, its universal morality and its emphasis on the quality of compassion. Yet, Ambedkar was conscious that there were aspects of Buddhist thought and organisation which would not be wholly acceptable to him, and he sought to cope with this problem by giving his own interpretation to the message of the Buddha. This is what he attempted to do in his treatise, the *Buddha and His Dhamma*. In the brief introduction to this book, he went directly to the heart of the matter and raised four important questions.

The first problem relates to the main event in the life of the Buddha, namely, *parivaraja*. Why did the Buddha take *parivaraja*? Ambedkar found the traditional answer in extent accounts of the life of Gautam unsatisfactory and provided his own explanation in terms of a moral dilemma which could occur only in the life of a person as high-minded and morally sensitive as Gautam was.

The second problem that Ambedkar raised was about the four Aryan truths which were considered a part of the original teachings of the Buddha. Ambedkar found this assumption unacceptable. He thought that the four Aryan truths made the gospel of the Buddha a gospel of pessimism by focusing on sorrow as the central fact of life. He wondered whether the four truths were really a part of the original Buddhist doctrine or a later interpolation.

The third problem was that if the Buddha denied the existence of the soul, how could there be rebirth and how could there be
karma? He wondered whether the Buddha used these terms in a sense other than the one usually given to them.

The fourth problem related to the status and functions of the bhikku: Was the bhikku only a perfect man or did he have a social function? If the bhikku was only a perfect man, he was of no use for the propagation of Buddhism. ‘This question’ Ambedkar said, ‘must be decided not so much in the interest of doctrinal consistency but in the interest of the future of Buddhism.’

We will discuss these question and Ambedkar’s answer to them not so much to decide the correctness of Ambedkar’s position but permissibly to see why these questions seemed so important to Ambedkar and how their being settled one way or the other would affect Ambedkar’s own philosophy. Ambedkar’s version of why Gautam took parivraja is wholly different from the traditional version in which he is said to have decided to give up his life as a young prince in response to his realisation of the transitoriness of life and the essential sorrow that lies at its core, which was sparked off by his passion an old man, a sick man and a dead body on one of his rare excursions outside the king’s palace. Ambedkar considered this story unlikely and unacceptable. Gautam was 29 years of age when he took parivraja and it was highly unlikely that a young man of his age could have remained ignorant of these facts of life, however protected his life may have been. Ambedkar’s story mentions all these incidents as also the fact that in his anxiety to forestall the possibility of his son taking to the life of a sanyasi, the king tried his best to keep him involved in a life of youthful pleasure.

But Ambedkar’s Gautam was amature person, who despite his philosophic leanings did not wish to turn his back on the realities of life. The parivraja was a self-selected mode of punishment for his disagreement with the council of elders on the question of whether the Sakyas should fight a war with the Koleyas—a neighbouring community—over a dispute regarding the use of water from a common rivulet. He considered war unnecessary and unwise as a way of resolving the dispute, but the council of elders felt otherwise. Since he was unwilling to fall in
line with the decision of the majority, since he did not wish his
family to suffer ostracism from the rest of the community and
since also the council could not sentence him to death without the
permission of the Magadh King—of whose empire the Sakya
kingdom was a small part—Gautam suggested and accepted the
only form of punishment that he could be given, viz., his banishment
as a parivrajaka. By so doing, Gautam kept his conscience clear
and yet submitted to the rules of discipline laid down by the
community. His was, therefore, a moral solution to a moral
dilemma. Besides, unlike the common version of Gautam’s secret
exit from the palace, in Ambedkar’s version he shows courage
and persuasive skill in getting his parents and his wife to accept
his decision.

Ambedkar’s version shows up Gautam in a much more
positive light—not as a person who seeks to shelter himself from
life’s sorrow but as a morally responsible, mature, philosophically
inclined person, who converts a difficult situation into a creative,
spiritual adventure of finding answers to the dilemmas of life,
which include not only its transitory nature and sorrow but also its
tendency to resort to violence as a way of resolving conflicts.

Ambedkar does not say whether there is any base on Buddhist
historical tradition for his version. It is of course plausible that,
consistent with the spirit of the times, two small neighbouring
communities like those of the Sakyas and the Koleyas would be
engaged in intermittent wars over territory or share of a common
water source, but to convert it into a moral dilemma resulting in
Gautam’s voluntary choice of a punishment was apparently
Ambedkar’s creative interpretation. Ambedkar’s message got a
further and new dimension when, according to his version, Gautam
decided to continue his self-imposed isolation even after he heard
that the Sakyas and Koleyas had agreed to settle their differences
through negotiations. Ambedkar’s Gautam looked upon the Sakya-
Koleya dispute as only one instance of the basic problem of
conflicts between individuals, between kingdoms and between
classes within the same society. This perception of a conflict of
interest between classes was again a new emphasis that Ambedkar added.

The second question that Ambedkar had raised about the Buddha’s teaching was whether the four Aryan truths which focused upon the centrality of sorrow in human life were really a part of the original Buddhist teaching or a later interpolation. He did not directly answer the question, but sought to mitigate the pessimistic implications of the four Aryan truths saying that Gautam’s teaching emphasised how sorrow could be overcome. Ambedkar raised the question specifically in a separate sub-section entitled ‘Is Buddhism Pessimistic?’. Noting that the accusation arose from the first Aryan truth which said that there is *dukkha* in the world, Ambedkar expressed surprise that this mere fact should have given rise to accusations of pessimism. He pointed out that the Buddha’s second Aryan truth emphasised that this *dukkha* must be removed. In the same sub-section, Ambedkar pointed out that Karl Marx also highlighted the exploitation in the world, yet no one accused Marx of being a pessimist. He said that the Buddha’s reference to birth, old age and death being sorrowful, in his first sermon, was a form of rhetoric used to underline the fact that his teaching was concerned with the removal of this suffering.

On the third question regarding how the Buddha could have affirmed the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth when he denied the existence of a soul, Ambedkar’s answer was that the Buddha’s law of *karma* only meant ‘reap as you sow’ and that it applied only to *karma* and its effect on present life. But then he went on to accept that there was an extended doctrine of *karma* which was often attributed to the Buddha and asked, ‘Did the Buddha believe in past *karma* having an effect on future life?’ He answered ‘The doctrine of past *karma* is a purely Brahmanic doctrine.’ He thought that it was introduced into Buddhism by those who wanted to make Buddhism akin to Hinduism. He further said that the doctrine of past karma as the regulator of future life was an iniquitous doctrine and the only purpose of introducing such a doctrine could have been for the state or the society to escape responsibility for
the condition of the poor. ‘It is impossible to imagine that the Buddha who was known as the Maha Karunika could have supported such a doctrine.’

But the Buddha had also talked of rebirth. If there was no soul, how could there be rebirth? Ambedkar’s explanation was that in Buddhist belief, when a person died, the elements of existence which make up the body joined the mass of similar elements floating in akash (space). When the four elements from this floating mass coalesced, a new birth took place. This is what the Buddha meant by rebirth. Thus, what was reborn was not the soul nor the personality, as was often imputed in Hindu thought.

Ambedkar was naturally keen that in his reason-based interpretation of the Buddha’s message, notions like rebirth and karma should not find a place. His objection to the idea of karma also flowed from his objection to fatalist explanations of sorrow and deprivation in a person’s life. Such an interpretation would strike at the root of any effort to promote self-help and hard work on the one hand and the responsibility of the society for the well-being of the individual on the other. These are the very reasons why both liberals and socialists all over the world have objected to any imputation of spiritual or moral element in the explanation for human suffering.

It is also possible that these notions of rebirth and karma were post-Gautam interpolations by his Brahman-dominated following—for, there were among the Buddhist elite many who were born Brahmans. But even if these notions were not interpolations, but were part of the Buddha’s message, it would not be very surprising because these were obviously areas in which the Buddha remained ambiguous—even if one goes by Ambedkar’s own version of what the Buddha said on the themes of soul, transmigration, rebirth and karma. Ambedkar reproduced the dialogue between Raja Pasenadi and the Tathagat. To the Raja’s question whether the Tathagat existed after death, the Buddha replied, ‘Not revealed by me, maharajah in this context.’ Again, to the question whether this meant the Tathagat did not exist after
death, the reply was the same. When pressed further, the Tathagat only replied by way of posing questions in turn. Obviously what the Buddha meant to suggest was that such queries were idle and born of sterile curiosity, rather than a genuine spiritual quest. But these quarries have been raised in all religions born in this subcontinent. Ambedkar said that while the Buddha denied the concept of the soul, he still affirmed rebirth. He insisted, ‘There can be rebirth even if there is no soul—just as there is a new tree born of a seed taken from the fruit of an earlier tree.’ There is no soul! Yes but then, there is a seed!38

The last question raised by Ambedkar concerned the role of the bhikku. From one point of view, a bhikku was a person who had decided to forgo family life in order that he may seek his own ‘spiritual’ fulfilment and was therefore admitted to a special order, which imposed certain moral and general behavioural discipline on its members and, at the same time, provided security and an opportunity for the uninterrupted pursuit of his goals. This ‘spiritual’ growth would, in Buddhist concept, consist of a moral and mental refinement and of developing the qualities of prajnya and karuna—wisdom and compassion or understanding and love. Ambedkar seemed to find this and such other objectives relating to the maturation of the individual members of the sangh an inadequate justification for the creation of the special status of the bhikku. It was not enough that a bhikku should develop into a perfect man.39

Quoting from Gautam’s dialogue with Nigrodha, Ambedkar said that the bhikku was not a mere ascetic. An ascetic could be rigorous in the observance of his special austerities, but he might be covetous, hot tempered, even hypocritical. But a bhikku could not allow himself such blemishes.

Ambedkar distinguished between a Brahman and a bhikku. A Brahman was born so and yet he might have no mental or moral training. Not so a bhikku. One became a bhikku by observing the norms of a bhikku’s life and being admitted to the sangh. The bhikku was also different from the upasaka—the lay Buddhist. The bhikku must observe the panchsilas; for the upasaka they...
were precepts but not commandments. ‘Why did the Blessed Lord make such a distinction? asked Ambedkar. He admitted that the reason for the distinction was nowhere explicitly stated by the Buddha. It had to be inferred. He said that the bhikku was intended to be the torch-bearer of the Buddha’s ideal society and the upasaka was to follow the bhikku as closely as possible. He then asked what the function of the bhikku was, and answered that the bhikku must both devote himself to self-culture and also serve the people and guide them. A bhikku who is indifferent to the woes of mankind, however perfect in self culture, is not at all a bhikku.’ This, again, is inference. The Buddha probably expected that if the bhikku did attain the discipline and the moral sensitivity emphasised by the eight-fold path, he would automatically be responsive to the needs of others. Ambedkar was keen that the bhikku and his sangh should become tools of social development and not remain preoccupied with self-refinement as an end in itself.

Ambedkar went on to list the functions of the bhikku as mentioned by the Buddha. The Buddha had said ‘Go ye now, and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world; for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and man.’ The bhikku was to convert people to the dhamma but not by miracles or force. Yet, Ambedkar interpreted the Buddha as having said that where virtue was in danger, the bhikkus were not to avoid fighting or be mealy-mouthed. He emphasised that the bhikku and the sangh were beholden to the laity for support and were reciprocally bound to serve the community and lead it to righteous conduct. The Vinaya Pitaka, Ambedkar said, require the bhikku to redress the complaints of the laity.

When Ambedkar’s book on the Buddha and his Dhamma was published, it was received adoringly by followers, coolly by most others and sardonically by orthodox Buddhists, whose attitude was probably summed up by the reviewer who said that the book was about Ambedkar and his dhamma. Leaving aside scholastic...
disputes, what emerged was a version of the Buddha’s teachings which was consistent with a modern liberal philosophy, met the criterion of a religion with a social mission and answered the needs of India’s deprived millions. It was kept on the plane of reason; it commended love and compassion, supported equality and individual freedom and emphasised individual responsibility.

To sum up, for Ambedkar the function of religion was to provide legitimacy to the set of values and rules that would help establish a moral order among human beings. These values and rules could be particularistic, relatively arbitrary and community specific when the communities were small and isolated. Concepts of local deities and of behavioural norms that were thought to please them, were an adequate base for a semblance of social order so long as they served the interests of the power elite in the community. But with changes in technology, in the means of production and the means of communication, isolated human groups were forced into contact with one another, and the need arose for new values and rules which were more universal. What was needed was a more universal morality and more universal concept of godhood. A morality which was based on the principles of truth and love, which recognised the principles of individual freedom, individual worth and equality was essential. Hinduism, according to Ambedkar, did not recognise the principles of freedom and equality and had not succeeded in evolving a universal morality. Buddhism had—especially if it was cleansed of the Brahmanic interpolations of the doctrines of karma and rebirth.

This last was important if the erstwhile untouchables were to be helped to free themselves from the weight of presumed sin and moral transgressions in a previous life, as accounting for their present misery. The individual had to have the confidence that his efforts could make a difference to his intellectual, material and moral well-being. A Buddhism which propagated the ideas of rebirth and karma could hardly help in this direction. Equally, the notion of a soul which progressed slowly through successive births towards self-realisation could not provide the basis for a belief in the freedom of the will and the immediate efficacy of action.

April 2003
Relevance of Religion in the Modern Age

How far is religion relevant in the modern age? It is very difficult to judge with regard to a particular religion. But man has to consider this question, because he is, somehow, related to this or that religion. For this purpose, Ambedkar has applied the test of justice and the test of social utility to judge the relevance of a religion. It is really desirable to put relation on its trial from time to time. It is true, as Ambedkar recognised, that religion, as a social force, cannot be ignored.

Besides, religion stands for a scheme of divine governance, though non-existent, yet it is real as we find in the case of Hindu social order. What is Ambedkar’s test of justice and utility? It consists in the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, a trinity of great principles. Does Hinduism recognise and practise them? No, not at all as Ambedkar realised it. Therefore, he renounced it and took refuge in the Dhamma of Lord Buddha, which stood for the great principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He examined the basic tenets of Hindu social order and found them inimical to social utility and individual justice. In a nutshell, ‘... Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity’, as was asserted by Ambedkar.\textsuperscript{43} For Ambedkar, religion is a social force, and is essential for man and society. He agreed with Edmund Burke who said:

‘True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true civil Government rests, and both their sanction’\textsuperscript{44}

But at the same time, Ambedkar condemned a religion of rules and preferred a religion of principles. ‘Which along could lay claim to being a true Religion’\textsuperscript{45} For him the distinction between rules and principles was real and most significant. He drew a fine distinction between both kinds of religions as follows:

‘Rules are practical, they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual, they are useful methods of judging things. Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a
specific course of action. Rules, like cooking recipes, do tell just what to do and how to do it. A principle such as that of justice, supplies a main head by reference to which he is to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes, it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important consideration which he should bear in mind. This difference between rules and principles makes the acts done in pursuit of them different in quality and in content. Doing what is said to be good by virtue of a rule and doing good in the light of a principle are two different things. The principle may be wrong but the act is conscious and responsible. The rule may be right but the act is mechanical. A religious act may not be a correct act but must at least be a responsible act. To permit of this responsibility. Religion must be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules, it ceases to be Religion, as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act.46

It is quite evident now that Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion stands for the necessity of religion in society. Over a long period of social development, man has really become a ‘religious being’. At present, religion has a hold on mankind. Besides, its spiritual aspects, religion gives us some secular ideals, and its power depends upon its power to confer material benefits to mankind. Although Ambedkar realised that ‘to ignore Religion was to ignore a live wire’.47 At the same time, he emphasised that:

“Religion must not be multitude of commands and prohibitions, because such religion tends to deprive the moral life of freedom and spontaneity and tends to reduce it to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. He also disliked a Religion as a Law or as legalised class ethics as we find in some of the existing religions”.48

Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion rests on the following premises:

1. That religion is necessary for man and society to manage the secular and moral affairs of mankind; but to hold the view that all religions are equally true and good is to cherish a wrong belief.
2. That most of the existing religions are theistic and metaphysical; but to maintain that God is an essential element of a religion is also to nourish a mistaken faith.

3. That religions wish to develop the social systems of their own choice to bring men together in peace for progress; but to bestow a divine governance over them is to prevent the growth of an open society.

4. That religions must preserve their text-books for guiding the people in right direction; but to believe in their infallibility and divine authority is to mar the growth of free inquiry and critical reason.

5. That eternal soul is unknown and unseen, a mere metaphysical speculation and to say that an individual’s aim of life is to achieve its salvation (Moksha) is to escape the social responsibility bestowed on him as a member of society.

6. That all religions develop some sort of prayers and pilgrimages, rituals and ceremonies, as religious duties for men simply being certain appendages to a religion; but the most integral part of a religion is the morality it professes for the welfare of mankind.

7. That the centre of religion is man, the base is morality, the aim is the secular welfare of mankind, and the means is the righteous conduct embedded in social responsibility that all human beings owe towards their fellow-beings living in human society.

8. That the test of justice and utility must be applied to judge the relevance of a religion, and that consists in the trinity ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity to effect the necessary change in its social norms of cruel and tyrannical nature.

The scope of Ambedkar’s philosophy of religion is much more than what I have undertaken to analyse in the foregoing pages. It is vast and immense. It requires a full text to cover all its aspects. I have simply given some outlines of it and have reached
the conclusions of thoughtful nature. I leave it to you to judge without having prejudices and presuppositions of sentimental nature.

REFERENCES
24. Moon, 1979, p. 75.

April 2003
29. Ibid., pp. 96–99.
33. Ibid., pp. 94–95.
34. Ibid., pp. 143–46.
37. Ibid., p. 342.
38. Ibid., p. 330.
39. Ibid., pp. 335–36.
40. Ibid., p. 552.
41. Ibid., Book IV, pts. 2 and 3.
42. Ibid., p. 435.
44. —, Annihilation of Caste, p. 74.
45. Ibid., p. 74.
46. Ibid., p. 71.
48. —, Annihilation of Caste, pp. 72–73.
Dr. Ambedkar had a first-hand experience of untouchability in school, where he was segregated from caste Hindus. He was allowed to drink water from a vessel only if it was poured from a height by the peon. In his biography, he spoke of school days when he would not drink water as very often the peon intentionally became unavailable. Even today, there are instances where Dalit children are made to sit separately for the mid-day meal. Dr. Ambedkar throughout his life advised Dalits to get educated before agitating for their rights. Data from the House listing & Housing Census 2011 highlight the continued injustice done to Dalits through the demeaning practice of manual scavenging. These workers collect human excreta with their brooms and tinplate and carry it for disposal. Studies of Ambedkar and Mahar (or Dalit, the term now preferred by the Mahar community) Buddhism typically conclude that its character as an Indian religion was a crucial reason for Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism rather than, for instance, Christianity. Is this interpretation of the Buddhist tradition as one of many possible representatives of an Indie philosophical and spiritual tradition the only way Indian Untouchables understand Buddhism's relation to Brahmanical social and political dominance? From the point of view of the group, kinship calls for a feeling that one is first and foremost a member of the group and not merely an individual. Ambedkar's understanding of religion's social force relies explicitly upon his reading of Ambedkar's aim in launching this journal was to put forward his own point of view on matters such as Swaraj, the education of the untouchables, and the evils of untouchability, which had hitherto not found due representation in mainstream Hindi journals. Mooknayak remained in circulation for three years. Often the differences on the basis of religion find expression in such extremities of conduct that they are the cause of bloodshed. The point worth remembering is that this tower has no staircase and therefore there is no way of climbing up or down from one floor to another. The floor on which one is born is also the floor on which one dies. No matter how meritorious a person from a lower floor might be, there is no avenue for him to climb up to the upper floor.