

Is Buddhism of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and Buddhism of Acharya Goenkaji the Same?

Gajanan Bhalerao

SRTMU Nanded, Maharashtra, India
vijaybhalerao2050[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *The present research paper aims to compare the similarities and the differences between the Buddhism revived by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in India and Buddhism of the renowned Vipassana Meditation Guru Acharya S.N. Goenkaji. The similarity is about Nibbana, Mind as a supreme power and futility and the dangers of the caste system. The differences are about Nonviolence, Rebirth, and Theory of Buddhahood and Capitalism. The differences are serious in nature. Buddhism of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is in accordance with the modern science while latter's is contradictory to it.*

Keywords: Suffering, Nibbana, Vipassana, Rebirth, Nonviolence

1. Introduction

Buddhism, throughout the world, is astonishingly different with one another according to country, region, or culture. In India Buddhism revived by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is dominant. The Dhamma (Buddhism) i.e. Vipassana is also widely practiced in India as well as throughout the world. Millions of Indian people who embraced Buddhism inspired by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar (majorly the Marginalized); seem to be confused about the Vipassana Meditation taught by Acharya S N Goenka. This comparative study of Buddhism revived by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and Vipassana taught by Acharya S N Goenka will definitely help these people to solve their confusion as well as beneficial for the intellectual people who are interested in Buddhism and engaged in human welfare activities. The study focuses on similarities and the difference of these two visionaries' understanding of the Dhamma* (Buddhism).

*Acharya S N Goenka uses the word 'Dhamma' not 'Buddhism' because for him, Buddha used it to connote the Universal Laws applicable for everybody. The word Buddhism connotes sectarianism.

2. Literature Survey

Buddhism revolves around human mind. It aims to train mind to make it pure and crystal clear (ability to see the things as they are). Consequently it leads to a pure happy and a harmonious society. This theme has been discussed. With this Caste system, Non violence, rebirth, theory of Buddha hood and capitalism are addressed in this paper.

3. Objectives

- 1) To find out the similarities and the differences.
- 2) To analyze the differences with a scientific and a humanitarian approach.

4. Methods

Comparative, analytical and critical methods are used.

5. Discussion

The answer of the title question is - some similarities and some differences. These differences are very serious in nature. Before moving towards these serious differences let's discuss the similarities first. The first similarity is about the concept of *Nibbana* i.e. deliverance. The doctrine of *Nibbana* is the core of Buddhism. *Nibbana* means a state of human mind and life in which there is no suffering, a complete peaceful state of mind and the life. This state, according to Acharya Goenkaji, can be achieved by practising Vipassana. Before this meditation one has to practise *Anapana* Meditation i.e. mindfulness meditation. This meditation is prerequisite of Vipassana Meditation. It makes mind to concentrate on the present and stops to wander it in the past and the future. It wanders in the unwanted and wanted things of past. Past unwanted things means hatred, past wanted things means craving and things of imaginary future means delusion. Continuous practice will remove the *Vicaras* (Vices): *Attachment, Aversion and Ignorance* ^[1]. *Vipassana* means to see as it is ^[2]. One has to observe unpleasant sensations of the body without reacting them as good or bad, similar process should be followed for pleasant and neutral sensations. By doing this process; *Aversion, Attachment and Ignorance* will be eradicated ^[3]. These evil passions are always hidden in the subconscious mind. Means, this technique makes subconscious mind free from the *Vicaras*. Then there will be no difference between subconscious and conscious mind. Mind becomes super-conscious. This stage is called as *Sankhara Upekha*, equanimity towards all conditioning. Means this technique teaches to see the things clearly and as it is. Hence mind becomes balanced and equanimous after the liberation from the *Vicaras*. The similar meaning of Vipassana is given by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in his Pali dictionary. The meaning is *seeing Clearly, Spiritual Insight* ^[4]. According to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, "Nibbana means enough control over passion so as to enable one to walk on the path of righteousness. It was not intended to mean anything more" ^[5]. The path of righteousness is nothing but the Noble - Eightfold Path. On the next page of the same discussion Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar gives the conversation of Sariputta and Radha regarding the same topic. Means, the toxic passions should be replaced by the virtues so that the mind

will be engaged in the *Kushal Kamma (Good thoughts and deeds)* However, Practicing the Dhamma (Panch Sil, Ten Paramitas and Ashtang Marga) leads to Nibbana for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. In short, for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, a person who has enlightened his or her life by eradicating attachment, enmity and delusion; devoted himself or herself to the welfare of others without expecting anything in return by using scientific humanitarian compassionate approach is Nibbana.

Moving towards Vipassana, P. L. Narsu, in his seminal work, 'Essence of Buddhism,' refers Vipassana indirectly. He says that the novice who would join the Sangha had to undergo the training of detached feelings to the sensations [6]. It's true that Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar did not write any article or small booklet on Vipassana. It does not mean that he denied it completely. He says, "What are the teachings of Buddha? This is a question of which no two followers of Buddha or students of Buddhism agree. To some Samadhi is his principal teaching. To some it is Vipassana. (a kind of Pranayama) To some it is esoteric to other it is exoteric... Some of the views are those of men who have a fancy for certain things. Such are those who regard that essence of Buddhism lies in Samadhi or Vipassana or Esoterism [7]. By concluding the chapter he says that Buddha has a social message i. e. liberty, equality and fraternity. It is clear that he is against those who claim that the essence of Buddhism is Samadhi of Vipassana. It does not mean that he denied it completely. If he had denied it, he would have mentioned it clearly like his rejection of unscientific rebirth theory, impractical and extreme nonviolence theory and contradictory four noble truth theory. The question is that how could he deny it as it is a universal psychological technique of the human mind? Many psychologists, throughout the world like Robert Wright, use this technique to cure suffering. The book *Why Buddhism is True* beautifully depicts this problem [8]. Therefore we can conclude that Dr Ambedkar knew that Vipassana is a technique to see as it is; in his words, 'seeing clearly, spiritual insight'. But it is not the whole essence of Buddhism.

Another similarity is futility of caste and its dangers. Both of them lucidly explain it. They were well aware about its oppressive nature which brings sorrows and sufferings for everybody including the upper castes although intensity of the suffering is not similar. Caste is a mental slavery. Every Indian is a mentally fractured person. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and Goenkaji equally stress on the importance of status of a human on his or her actions not by birth. Acharya Goenkaji says, "No one is outcaste by birth, no one a Brahmin by birth; by one's actions alone one can become outcaste, by one's actions alone one can become a Brahmin [9]." While Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar writes, "His doctrine was just the opposite of the doctrine of the Brahmins. It was his doctrine that worth not the birth was the measure of man [10]." Both of these visionaries have given the ample examples of Buddha's debates with Brahmins against the caste system.

The next, the most important similarity is about mind. Both are agree to the supremacy of mind. The whole Vipassana meditation revolves around the mind. It purifies the mind,

makes the mind free from the Vicaras (vices) –Attachment, Aversion and Ignorance and targets the Nibbana i. e. freedom from Suffering. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, in his book *Buddha and His Dhamma*, devoted a separate part, named 'Buddhist Way of Life' to this subject. In this part, mind is the central theme. The chapters named Man Mind and Impurities, Of Thoughtfulness and Mindfulness, On Good, Evil and Sin, Earnestness and Boldness, On Sorrow and Happiness, On Charity and Kindness [11] etc stress on importance of cultivation of mind. Hence, here is no reason for anybody to doubt about this similarity. The last similarity is about soul. Both of them do not believe in the existence of soul as does the modern science. According to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar the theory of soul gives birth to superstitions and peisthood. Hence it is more dangerous than the belief in God. His doctrine about the soul is called as An - atta, no soul [12] & [13]. One thing is noteworthy here that Goenka Guruji throughout his life opposes sectarianism i. e. traditional way of religion i. e. worshipping, prayers, and superstitions and so on. He opposed it because it lacks universality. Therefore he opposed conversion from one religion to another. According to him Dharma can be practiced by everybody without any boundary of caste, race, religion, culture, language, gender or nation as it is universal in nature. Every human being is a victim of *Vicaras* hence he/she suffers. But he did not oppose the famous historical conversion of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar rather he supported it by saying conversion from ignorance to knowledge, from inequality to equality. [14]

Now let's move towards the most important part of this writing, differences between these two visionaries. The first difference is about *Rebirth*. For Acharya Goenkaji *Rebirth* can be avoided (liberation from it) by getting Nibbana. And Nibbana can be got only by practicing Vipassana rigorously [15]. When one gets rid of from the Vicaras; he/she can be free from the cycle of rebirth. The very similar view is held by His Holiness 14th Dalai Lama.

But for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Rebirth* means nothing but the birth of a new mango tree from the seed of the mango, the birth of a new lamp from the old lamp. Both the latter creations (products) are the creations of the formers. This new mango tree or new lamp has some characteristics or traits of its creators but both are different. It is exactly same with the human baby and its parents. The baby carries the genes from its parents. In the traditional theory of rebirth, soul is eternal and after the death of the present body it takes a new body. The human body according to Buddha is made up of four elements namely Prithvi, Aap, Tej and Vayu [16]. The body dies means the body elements go to its Universal Stocks. This rebirth is in consonance with modern science. As law of conservation says energy can not be created nor be destroyed but it can be transformed from one form to another. This view, according to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is of Buddha about *Rebirth*. In short, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's Buddha is coherent to modern science and Acharya Goenkaji's Buddha is contradictory to the modern science. Goenkaji's theory of rebirth not only goes against science but also democratic socialism. According to Goenkaji, a person is rich in this life because of his/her previous life's good karmas. If we agree with this kind of view, then the traditional suppressed, deprived, depressed

and the oppressed classes (SC, ST, OBCS and Women) of India or the similar suffered black people of the world should remain as it is! Because they did bad karmas in their previous lives! It means this kind of view strengthens the man made social evils. It is a crystal clear fact that Caste system has given the special privileges, majority of the natural resources, right of education, and weapon to the upper caste males. The similar scenario is of sufferings of the Black people created by the White. In short, Goenkaji's rebirth theory is fatal to the cause of democratic socialism which aims to create equality.

The next great difference is about Nonviolence and Flesh Eating. According to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Buddha's Nonviolence is 'Need to Kill' not 'Will to Kill' or 'Never to Kill'. The last two belong to Brahmanism and Jainism respectively^[17]. His Ahimsa (Nonviolence) is not absolute but relative. He opposed animal killing in Yadnyas. He never prohibited eating flesh. The Bhikkus were allowed to eat flesh if they got it in their alms provided they should not be responsible in the killing. However he never said to meek surrender to the evil. Therefore he never opposed the military. On the other hand, Acharya Goenkaji rejects flesh eating because it creates craving^[18]. However it is impossible to lead the life without killing a living being. The plants have lives and in air there are everywhere tiny microbes. Means during breathing, we, unknowingly, kill thousands of microbes^[19]. In fact absolute non violence is impossible and impractical, against the nature itself. After a closure look, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's Buddha is according to modern science

Another important difference is about the theory of Buddhata or Buddhahood (Theory of Enlightenment) according to Acharya Goenkaji, "Someone becomes Samma Sambuddha because he discovers Vipassana^[20]." It is possible when the Vipassana is totally lost. But according to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, to become a Buddha one must go through the ten stages^[21]. These ten stages are: 1) Mudita - comes by removing defilements 2) Vimala - (Shuddhi, Purity) Comes by removing all thoughts of lust.3) Prabhakari - (Brightness) Comes by grasping the truth of Anatta (Not - Self) and Anitya (Flux Momentariness).4) Archismati ((Intelligence of Fire) Comes after fixing the mind on Eightfold Path, The four Contemplations, The Fourfold Contest, Fourfold Will Power and Fivefold Morality.5) Sudurjaya (Difficult to Conquer) Comes after understanding the relation between relative and absolute.6) Abhimukhi - Comes after getting knowledge of evolution of things its causes and twelve nidanas.7) Durangama (going far off) - Comes after going beyond time and space, one with infinity but still remains Nam - Rupa out of great compassion for all.8) Achala (Immovable) In this stage all strivings stop, whatever he does becomes successful in it.9) Sadhumati - comes after vanquishing all Dharmas or systems, all quarters.10) Dharmamedha - attainment of infinite divine eye of Buddha. With this he has to practise ten *Paramitas* step by step.

After analyzing all these ten stages, stages 1 - 4 are very much similar to Vipassana. All these aim to remove the defilements (Vicaras). The fourth one replaces the vices into the virtues. But fifth and sixth seem to different but not

completely different like other remaining. In Durangama, Bodhisattva devotes his/her life for the welfare of others without bothering the opposition of people as they are ignorant.

In the same chapter, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar has given the four stages of enlightenment. They are: 1. Reason and Investigation 2. Concentration 3. Equanimity and Mindfulness 4. Purity to equanimity and equanimity to purity. As compare to Vipassana, first stage is totally different. By this stage one can find cause and effects of any problem while other three are very similar to Vipassana as it teaches concentration, mindfulness and equanimity (*Samatha*)

Let's move towards the last difference i.e. Poverty and the role of capitalism. It is true that in Buddha's time there was not a complex society like today's. Today, capitalism is capturing the global economy including India. Unequal distribution of natural resources and income, caste system and lack of education are the major reasons to cause suffering. No doubt poverty causes suffering. Hence, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar wanted to eradicate the poverty by democratic socialism. Therefore he used Buddha's principles liberty, equality and fraternity to frame India's constitution^[22]. Privatization brings concentration of money to one class and unhappiness to other class. This is also a cause of suffering^[23]. But Acharya Goenkaji never talks about this vital problem. For him changing the mindsets of the rich by Vipassana is the only and the best way. But is it possible practically? Of course it is highly impossible. The present condition of depressed classes and women, as compare to the last thousands of years, is quite good due to the social reformations by many social reformers including Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

6. Finding

Buddhism of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar is in accordance with Modern Science.

7. Conclusion

To sum up the paper, the similarity between Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's Buddhism and Acharya Goenkaji's Buddhism is about the concept of Nibbana, Vipassana, and denial of the soul theory, caste nonsense and mind as the supreme, the centre of the human life. But there are serious differences about the theory of rebirth, nonviolence and flesh eating which go against modern science. Rebirth goes against the democratic socialism and strengthens the social inequalities like caste, gender, class, and race. The theory of rebirth also goes against democratic socialism especially principle of equality. Whatever goes against science becomes theoretical superstitious bigotry or dogma and this bigotry creates more dangers to the humanity than any other evil thing in the world.

8. Future Scope

In the future there is a scope for the analysis of more empirical data of psycho - socio suffering of human beings

and how they liberated themselves by applying the Dhamma (Buddhism) in their lives.

References

- [1] Hart, William. *The Art of Living*. Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri, (1988) P. VII
- [2] Ibid. P - 06
- [3] Ibid. P. - 123.
- [4] Ambedkar, B. R. *The Pali Dictionary*. Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol.16, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra. (2012) P – 415.
- [5] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 237.
- [6] Narsu, P. L. *The Essence of Buddhism*. Taipei, Taiwan The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation, Taipei, Taiwan (1999) P - 133.
- [7] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol.11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 225.
- [8] Wright, Robert. *Why Buddhism is True*, New York: Simon & Schuster (2017) P -
- [9] Goenka, S. N. *The Buddha as Depicted in Tipitika*, Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri Igatpuri (2019) P - 145 - 247.
- [10] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha and His Dhamma*, Mumbai: 'Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 306.
- [11] Ibid - P 355 - 372.
- [12] Ibid - P 261, 259.
- [13] Goenka, Satyanarayan. *Kya Buddha Nastik The?* Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri Igatpuri (2008)) P - 74.
- [14] Goenka, S. N. *The Buddha's Non - Sectarian Teaching*. Igatpuri: `Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri (2019) P - 14.
- [15] Goenka, S. N. *The Origin and Spread of Vipassana*. Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri Igatpuri (2011) P - X.
- [16] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha and His Dhamma*, Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 330 - 336.
- [17] Ibid - P - 345.
- [18] <https://www.vridhamma.org/A-store-house-of-answers-by-Shri-S-N-Goenka/food>
- [19] Sankrityan, Rahul. *The Supreme Buddha*. New Delhi: Samyak Publication (2009) P - 71.
- [20] Goenka, S. N. *The Origin and Spread of Vipassana*. Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri (2011) P - VIII.
- [21] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 76 - 78.
- [22] Ambedkar, B. R. *Dr Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution Vol - 17 (3)* Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 11, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 503.

- [23] Ambedkar, B. R. *Buddha or Karl Marx?* Mumbai: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches - Vol 03, Education Dept Govt of Maharashtra (2016) P - 552.

Author Profile



Gajanan A M Bhalerao did his Post- Graduation in MA (English) from SRTMU, School of Language and Literature Nanded. He is also NET and SET qualified in English. He worked as an Assistant Professor in many colleges of Maharashtra. His area of Interest is Buddhism and Literature of Marginalized people.