
UNIT 4 FUTURE OF DALIT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this Unit are to provide a normative basis for a philosophy of Religion in order to reconstruct Dalit perspectives of Religious philosophy. The normative basis of a philosophy of religion would serve as the basis to engage any analysis of religion as to enable a Dalit perspectives religion. In this unit we shall attempt to give an understanding of what is meant by a philosophy of religion, problems that are usually dealt in a course on philosophy of religion with the aim of scrutinizing their relevance to Dalit reality and then proceed to evolve the rational basis for a religious philosophy of Dalits with a futuristic orientation.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Generally what is meant by 'Religion' is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices mostly agreed and followed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern about the cause, nature, and purpose of the individual and the universe, and it involves devotional and ritual practices observances. Religions often contain moral norms that go to govern the individual and the society. Ever since the origin of human class, human demonstrated religious inclination and behaviour in terms of practicing certain types of faith in an invisible power and began to worship it in specific manners. The origins of religion is found in the form of diverse worship rituals to a supreme power or God the practice of which helped human to introduce certain social or cultural mores of social rules of conduct to keep himself/herself or his/her social group intact and appease the supreme god for protection. Religion is also understood as a cultural system establishing symbols that relate humanity to deeper truths and values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions, cultural practices and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to human life. Morality and preferred form of life are derived from religious ideas. Sometimes, the word 'religion' is interchangeable with particular faith or belief system. But religion differs from private belief and has a public aspect. Most religions in the world are expressed through organized group behaviours such as prayer, regard for priestly hierarchies, reverence for Holy Scriptures and places usually followed by a set of prescribed norms of

respective religions. Religious philosophy of the Dalit would begin with such a notion of religion as cultural system and religion as communitarian expression in the public sphere.

4.2 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

Religious philosophy or philosophy of religion according to most western philosophical traditions is but a rational attempt to justify the religious ideas of specific religious beliefs. From the Aristotelian and Scholastic tradition, it has been called as theodicy or natural theology. Since the medieval Christian tradition it has been regarded as an handmaid to theological claims about the nature of God and his role in human society. As an ancient discipline it was related to other branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, logic and history. It is frequently discussed mostly regarding the existence of God and the problem of evil. Generally, it is considered as a study of and a 'thinking about' religion. This discipline is usually carried out dispassionately by persons who self-describe as believers, those who may be called nonbelievers, and others who may treat or characterize their own belief or belief in general in specialized ways.

We make a subtle distinction between the usual philosophies of religion with that of religious philosophy. Philosophy of religion is concerned with questions regarding religion, including the nature and existence of God, the examination of religious experience, analysis of religious language and texts, and the relationship of religion and science. Religious philosophy in general is concerned about the rational scrutiny of religions as to evaluate its ideological, moral and structural (social & political) grounds for the promotion of a humane society based on the principle of an ethic of liberation with a view of responding against the religious, cultural and social facets of discrimination and dehumanization. While philosophy of religion may evolve as a justified belief, religious philosophy on the other hand is a rational investigation of the ethical demands of such a philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion differs from religious philosophy in that it seeks to discuss questions regarding the nature of religion as a whole, rather than examining the problems brought forth by a particular belief system.

4.3 NATURAL THEOLOGY (THEODICY) AS A FAILED SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

As natural theology philosophy of religion was reduced only as an attempt to provide proofs or arguments for the existence of God. These attempts presumed an assumption that the existence of God can be justified or warranted on rational grounds. There has been considerable philosophical and theological debate about the kinds of proofs, justifications and arguments that are appropriate for this discourse. Ludwig Wittgenstein instead of grinding the traditional exercise for or against the proof of the existence of God, directly engages a linguistic-cultural (phenomenological) rendering of religion. For him religion, more than the traditional claim on the centrality of some sort of belief in God, is a "form of life" relevant to those who adhere to it. It is a sort of cultural linguistic game whose rules are better understood by those who participate in the specific forms of religious life. Phillips rejects "natural theology" and its evidentialist approach as confused, in favour of a grammatical approach which investigates the meaning of religious claims. Consequently, the question of whether God exists confuses the logical categories which govern theistic language with those that govern other forms of discourse (most notably, scientific discourse). According to Phillips, the question of whether or not God exists

cannot be "objectively" answered by philosophy because the categories of truth and falsity, which are necessary for asking the question, have no application in the religious contexts wherein religious belief has its sense and meaning. In other words, the question cannot be answered because it cannot be asked without entering into confusion. As Phillips sees things, the job of the philosopher is not to investigate the "rationality" of belief in God but to elucidate its meaning and by extension of its social meaning.

4.4 AMBEDKAR'S ANALYSIS OF RELIGION

Ambedkar's philosophical analysis of religion is an illustration of Dalit religious philosophy. His scrutiny of religion in general and of Hinduism in particular, in his classical work *Philosophy of Hinduism* is illustrative of Dalit Religious philosophy. He throws new light on critique of religious thought and point to a definite approach to the strengthening of Indian society based on the human values of equality, liberty and fraternity. Future of Dalit religious philosophy has such an analysis directed towards emancipation projects of the Dalits themselves.

He developed an indigenous analysis of religion to understand the nature of Hinduism and evaluate its social function, against the usual model of the Western 'theodicy-model.' His is a critique of religion for liberation. Dalit religious philosophy, in Ambedkar is a philosophy of emancipatory religion. Ambedkar points out that there are three important theses that form the subject matter of a philosophical analysis of religion both in natural and social theology. They are: '(1) The existence of God (2) God's Providential government of the universe and (3) God's moral government of mankind (society).' Ambedkar's analytical interest is to find out whether Hinduism as a religion and social order is an ideal scheme of divine governance whose aim is to make the social order a moral order. He observes that Hinduism has a written form constitution, *Manu Smriti* from which *scheme of divine governance* is easily deducible.

By his extensive analysis of religion, Ambedkar has the following significant notions. The Religion of the savage society is group or clan-centered. In it, there is no idea of a universal morality. The religion of the antique society had the idea of God but, it could only be at the level of national religion. The religion of the modern society has both the idea of a universal God and universal morality. Thus, there has been a transformation in the history of religion. There has been conceptual revolution in the truth-claims of religion. From group-identity, there was a change (revolution) to the idea of trans-group identity (national) and from the national identity, there emerged a revolution to the idea of God and morality to be universal and all-embracing of humanity and its social existence. There has been a revolution or ideological change regarding the notion of God. From no idea of god, to an idea of a god of this or that particular group's god or gods and from the group-gods to an idea of a national god and from the idea of a national god to the idea of a universal god. From the concept of a plurality of God, it changed to an idea of a singular God of human society. And such a god has been conceived to be creator, governor of morality. There has been a shift from the mere idea of fear of god to the idea of social existence based on morality. Ambedkar points out that revolution or conceptual change is the necessary prerequisite to the authenticity of religion. Thus, there has been a change or revolution in the concepts of morality as well as God in the history of religion.

As 'revolution' is the mother of philosophy and a lamp that illuminates philosophy, the best criterion to judge the philosophy of (any) religion is to study the Revolutions which religion has undergone. He says, "Progress in philosophy has come about by theoretical revolutions that has taken place in the history of philosophy." By revolution, he clarifies that it is meant to be both a conceptual or theoretical and social in nature. By social revolution he means alternative changes in structures of society towards an egalitarian social order. If any religion does not pass the test of 'such revolutions' both theoretical and social then, it tends to be not positivistic. He holds that a truth claim of a religion must necessarily pass through the test of reason. Revolution in the sense of theoretical and social has been the hallmark of religion in general. It has undergone changes from ancient to modern society. From the idea of natural gods to supernatural gods, and from the idea of supernatural gods to an idea of a single Creator –God and from the idea of a single creator-god to an idea of a moral God (who is the governor of morality in society) and from the idea of a moral-God to an idea of humanistic God. Thus, revolution is the way religion has progressed towards the modern society. It is an essential criterion for the authenticity of the truth claims of any religion.

Alongside revolution, the principles of social utility, justices and equality are spelt out by Ambedkar as verification criteria to judge the authenticity of a religion. In the antique society, utility was the criterion to judge right or wrong. The welfare of the tribe as a whole is considered the essential morality of the tribe. In addition, God must be useful in sustenance, and preservation and protection of tribe. The utility God is to protect the tribe not as individual but as society as a whole. Justice as a criterion is appropriate to the modern world in which the individual in the society is the end and the moral good of the society does justice to the individual. The norm or the criterion of judging the appropriateness of religion according to Ambedkar should not only be 'Godly' but also be earthly.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is your general understanding of religion?

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2) How is theodicy or natural theology different from Dalit Religious Philosophy?

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4.5 AMBEDKAR'S DALIT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

Ambedkar is not a denier of the need of religion. For him, religion is necessary; it is a social necessity to provide a moral unity. 'Religion is a social force ... religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for the society to follow. The norm of utility in religion would promote unity of society as a whole.' Ambedkar points out, "The Hindu is not prepared to face any inquiry" and he is not ready to change from his Vedic belief system. The Hindu way of life is deterministic; it is against the principle of any change or revolution or freedom. according to Ambedkar, the philosophy of Hinduism does not practice or even conceive the possibility of any revolution. In contrast to Hinduism, the very basis or the philosophical foundation of Buddhism lies on the acceptance of the reality of Change as the ultimate fact of reality.

Religion could function as an instrument of oppression or liberation depending upon its worldview and its social practices. If religion is based on the notion of revolution or change then it is liberative and if religion propagates infallibility and total surrender to its totalitarian perspective then, it would be oppressive. Religion needs to be dynamic for Ambedkar, because it is concerned with love of truth.

Concept of Justice is a compendious one and is the foundation of a moral order. Justice has always evoked the ideas of equality, of proportion of "compensation." Ambedkar conceives the principle of Justice as containing the notions of liberty, equality and fraternity. The principle of Justice according to Ambedkar is one of the essential criteria for an authenticity of a religion. Liberty, to be real, must be accompanied by certain social conditions such as social equality and economic security and equality of educational opportunities. Religion is to promote economic security and viability on an equal basis, to every member of the society. Fraternity is fellow feeling. It is empathy to identify oneself with the-other in the society. It is 'relationality' and against individualism. It is brotherhood. It helps to sustain the moral order in the society. It is a natural sentiment.

4.6 CRITIQUE OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS INEQUALITY

For, Ambedkar, the theory of pollution is not originally untouchability, those who shared the caste-world-view, in order to resist those who did not share such ideology, introduced the concept of 'out-caste' whose original meaning is not untouchability but it is meant that there is separate group which does not share or which resists the idea of casteism. Ambedkar notes that the Buddhists are one such group of people who do not share the caste-ideology and who were the first to oppose caste and any other forms of segregation. He observes that the institution of caste is composed of certain universal Hindu ideas. These include the Hindu pollution concept such as the social units of *Jatis* (endogamous large-scale descent-groups), the cognitive categories of *Varnas* (ranked classification of *jatis*); the associated concepts of caste *dharma* (*varunashramdharma*) (religiously sanctioned duties of for the caste members) and sub-caste division of labour" all contribute to the practice of the division of human beings as pure versus impure. Such a position can neither be spiritual nor human.

Ambedkar establishes the conclusion that the philosophy of Hinduism does not promote nor contain the social value of justice. He points out that the moral order grounded in the Vedic world view is not-moral because it promotes a society of graded inequality, value hierarchy and value-dualism and exclusivism of the-social-other. He says, *Manu*, the author of Vedas, is a 'staunch believer in social inequality, and he knew that the danger of admitting religious equality. Ambedkar observes that the theory of the origin of the different caste groups, namely the theory of *Purushasukta*, uphold inequality. The metaphor of the *Purushasukta*, is a theory of the origin of the Universe. Its cosmogony interpretation of the emergence of the social system is strongly opposed by Ambedkar. He also questions the theory of the divine sanction for the establishment of the so-called '*sacred institution*'. Attempt to provide a divine sanction to caste-stratification by the author of the Vedas, is deliberate attempt to deify the social practice and by deifying caste-stratification it is meant to promote a collective consciousness that casteism is moral. Thus, Hinduism has paved a way for permanent system graded inequality that alienates every individual with the-other. It paves way for the practice of excluding the-other, which is opposed to social unity. The Vedas upheld a theory of occupational-determinism, according to which, the *Shudras* are to remain ever-slaves. Therefore, the philosophy of Hinduism cannot be said to promote of the principle of equality.

Caste is more than the mere division of labour. It is a division of labourers. It determines one's occupation according to the pre-determined theory of caste-birth. Caste prevents social mobilization. It creates contempt of labour and labourers. It is a division of labour accompanied by the division of labourers." Like its social and religious counterparts, the economic base of the caste system was not merely an ideal. The ideal was put in to practice and was, therefore, real. Caste miserably fails to be able to sustain every individual as a fraternal member of the society. Hinduism does not recognize liberty. Liberty, to be real, must be accompanied by certain social conditions such as social equality and economic security and equality of educational opportunities. It practices a philosophy of power relations wherein the poor and the weak are progressively silenced and negated. Hinduism does not also recognize fraternity is the opinion of Ambedkar. Hinduism is individualistic and not socially-oriented. It does not promote fellow feeling. Ambedkar observes, "Illiteracy became an inherent part of Hinduism by a process which is integral to it, it denied education to the people, namely the so-called untouchables. The notion of "education for masses" is absent in the philosophy of Hinduism. Thus, it has paved the way for 'secrecy of knowledge, monopoly of knowledge, and as a result, monopoly of societal power, at the expense denying the right of the suffering-other and sanctioning their denial as divine-based. The fact that Hindu social order, namely caste-system 'denies freedom of vocation' and it 'pre-ordains' it, according to one's caste category, proves that it does not promote liberty. In giving the critique of Hindu religion, Ambedkar envisages Dalit religious philosophy as realizing the ideal of liberty, social equality, economic security and education for all.

4.7 CHARACTERISTICS OF DALIT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

1. For a Dalit religious philosophy, hair splitting self-imposed arguments in defence of God or to provide sufficient reasons to justify the problem of evil on the pre-conceived idea that God is All-Good is not the primary crucial concern since these are ontologically pre-construed notions that side-line or misdirect social involvement and ethical regard/scrutiny of religion.

2. Dalit religious philosophy is not the philosophy of religion in the sense of dealing with nature, existence and the problem of defining God in particular ontological or metaphysical categories or an attempt to provide elaborate defence or offense of positioning God. It is to evolve a religious philosophy based on two principles of rationality and morality (ethic of liberation) as to check the validity of religious foundations and practices to promote a humane society based on justice and equality.

3. Dalit religious philosophy examines and critiques the epistemological, logical, aesthetic and ethical foundations inherent in the claims of various religions and check its sustainability to advance a society based on justice and equality. Whereas a traditional philosophy of religion or theology could elaborate metaphysically on the nature of God either rationally or experientially, a Dalit philosophy of religion is more interested in asking what may be ethically social and socially ethical without claiming any justified supremacy of one religious idea over or against the other.

4. Its chief aim is to evolve philosophy of religion, regardless of specific religious claims, the rational ground that provide a moral standard for harmonious social living. Dalit engagement of religion or Dalit religious philosophy intends to elucidate a content analysis of religions in terms of its authenticity to sustain the Dalit people as against the vulnerabilities of casteism.

5. From the point of view of Dalit religious philosophy or Dalit philosophy of religion, the traditional problems of natural theology is a failed social philosophy because it does not amount to involve the social content of religion rather it purports to reinforce dogmatic tenets of particular religious claims in an ontologically preconditioned manner.

6. Since religion covers a vast range of human actions, attitudes, perspectives, relations, codes of conduct, group behaviours, etc it is very difficult to define religion too narrowly as some do. Neglecting its multidimensional nature of religion, many provide a constricted understanding of their religions in exclusive categories. For them it is as theology, as only faith in God defined in certain conceptual categories, and as a specified set of belief systems and practices. Understanding the question of Dalit Religion or Dalit religious philosophy should therefore, include a variety of aspects such the cultural, the social, philosophical, anthropological categories. Dalit sense of religion is all-inclusive of these aspects and hence complex in treatment and understanding. There could be no single definition either of religion *per se* or Dalit religion in particular, that will suffice as to include the varied set of traditions, cultural practices and ideas that comprise it.

7. Dalits are culturally religious people. They absorb a variety of religious beliefs and practices such as; belief in supernatural powers, belief in the worship of Nature, Natural Objects, in utterance of prayers for strengthening of their livelihood and prosperity. They believe in spirits and spirits of their ancestors. They have faith in many or one God and believe in personal or impersonal God, in a God who is deemed a Creator and Protector against assaults and dangers, etc. There is belief and worship in a deity or deities, belief in pious devotional practices like offerings (mostly the fruit of the first harvest) to Gods/Deities. They visit to holy places or

pilgrim centres irrespective of any particular religion and undertake strict religious vows and observances. They believe in and follow certain social cum moral code of conduct.

8. Dalits are foundationally religious people however they may vary in their specific systems of beliefs or worships or religious observances or social mores for reasons that the term Dalit includes a variety of people with a complexity of social practices with diverse linguistic traditions. The only unifying facet is that the term Dalit refers to all those who are treated subhuman, as those who suffer the yoke of untouchability burdened by inhuman social religious and cultural caste system.

9. The belief in God is defined as theism where as the belief in no-God is atheism. Thus both theism and atheism are treated as exclusively opposed categories. Such an oppositional classification falls outside the purview of Dalit Religious philosophy because Dalits as historically and culturally religious people do not fall within the rigid prism of opposition either as believer or as unbeliever. Both the believer and the nonbeliever form the Dalit religious whole and demarcation in no way relevant in grouping the Dalits Religious philosophy as theistic or as atheistic. For instance the Dalits of Buddhist origin and/or conversion do not exercise belief in any theo-logical God, but still very much religious people.

10. There are varieties of theism such as, monotheism (belief in One God), polytheism (belief in many Gods), Deism (belief in a personal and transcendental God), henotheism (belief in one God without negating other gods), pantheism (Universe is God), pan-en-theism (God is part of nature) etc. To narrowly define Dalit religion in terms of any one of the varieties of theism is the rich complexity of Dalit religions. Within Dalit religiosity we may find diverse theistic trends but it is less likely to be a truism to define Dalit religion as forming a singular pattern of theism. Much more, one is bound to appreciate the cultural ground of Dalits as religious people instead of crudely classifying them in either camp of theism or atheism or its varieties.

4.8 FUTURE OF DALIT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

- Dalit Religious philosophy points towards a critique of religion which is based and regulated on certain rational, practical and moral principles.
- The purpose of Dalit religious philosophical engagement is emancipation or liberation of the suffering people under the burden of casteism. Hence which ever religion, be it Hinduism, Christianity or Islam if such religion imbibe caste cultural discriminatory practices, Dalit religious philosophy pronounces a methodological doubt regarding their religious claims and social content.
- The practical principle of Dalit Religious philosophy is to verify authentic sensibilities of religion in the sense that it should be guided by the principle of both conceptual and structural revolution. The revolution is classifiable into external and internal elements.
- An authentic religion should take into account progressive secularization of its foundations, in the sense that it should be relevant to the changing times and needs of human society.
- The metaphysical foundation of a true religion is constitutive of the metaphysics of change.

- An authentic religion must be grounded on the principles of justice and utility. It should be regulated by the practice of liberty, equality and fraternity.
- For Dalits Religion is of greater importance and cultural necessity. It could contribute social unity, provided it is based on the principles of revolution and social Justice. Since the philosophy of Hinduism can not be said to have founded on these principles, to consider it as a religion of societal liberation is not possible. The philosophy of Hinduism, as found in its scriptural tradition is not constitutive of the principles of revolution, justice and social utility. Given to its Caste-world view, and the social practice of Casteism, its philosophical ground is oppressive and therefore, cannot have the conceptual strength of promoting liberation of the socially weaker sections.
- Hence there arises the need for a religion that is based on the principles of social liberation that restores dignity, and affirms the life of the suffering-other in the society.
- A critique of religion in the Indian context presupposes a critique of Casteism in its social order. An authentic religion and religious is a critique of Casteism in favor of those who have been historically conditioned to the phenomenology of thrown-ness. That is to say it has to promote social justice as its ethical basis.
- A philosophical critique of religion should necessarily be a practical critique of discrimination in the society. And a critique of discrimination aims at the promotion of praxis of liberation. In brief, an authentic critique of religion and its social order addresses the problems of human society based on a philosophy of societal liberation.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Elucidate the problem of Dalits as viewed by Ambedkar in Hindu social order.

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2) Examine the criterion for a Dalit Religious Philosophy.

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3) Evaluate the authenticity of any other religion other than Hinduism based on the principles of Dalit Religious Philosophy.

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4) Can we categorise Dalits' religious belief in God in any or many forms of theism? Substantiate your answer.

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4.9 LET US SUM UP

In short, Dalit religious philosophy is not pertaining to the type of religious beliefs or the problems of existence of God or Evil. It is a philosophy to promote a social form of life based on ethic of emancipation. The test of ethical and social content as criterion for authenticity: A true religion for Ambedkar should have both ethical content and social content. Critique according to him, therefore includes both theory and practice. Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism is grounded in the discourse between a philosophy of oppression and a philosophy of liberation. It is the negation of the negations structured in an oppressive social system. There is nothing material or social in it. Ambedkar's denial of casteism and thereby his denial of Hinduism is a deliberate ethical move away from the institutional interests of casteism in favour of social communicative interests, grounded in the principle that liberty of all is primarily liberty of the particular in the social. Hence for a Dalit religious philosophy, humans are not isolated individuals devoid of any relations. The human has its existence only in relation to others. We are social in the global sense and hence we are interchangeably social. Whatever may be our society in the present age, we belong to the whole human society in a holistic sense. It is both process of reflection of an alternative philosophy and a social action for liberation.

4.10 KEY WORDS

Dalit – *Purusartha* – moral governance – social utility – revolution – justice – equality – liberation – discrimination – subjugation – scriptural basis – purity and pollution - ethics – Authenticity.

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