

Reading Response 5

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In Queen's article "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhism Liberation", Queen first introduces Berger's description of modernity. This is given as

For premodern man, heresy is a possibility – usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity. . . . Modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.

Here Berger describes that in premodern society, one was often born into a religion, and it was difficult if not impossible to change one's religion, or for that matter make any real decisions about their life. And he defines modernity as a society where picking one's religion is practically a necessity, one is no longer obligated to continue with the religion of one's parents, but has the opportunity to search through all the religions of the world and select the best religion for their point of view.

This definition of modernity, and a modern person, being one who takes part in making these decisions, and using their ability to select a religion to proceed in to research and eventually an educated choice as to which religion to follow.

By this definition Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is a prime example of a modern man, and clearly demonstrates the modernity of the time. Ambedkar began life, according to Berger, as a premodern man. He inherited Hinduism, in a society which relatively locked him in his social class, as Queen states "As a member of the lowly Mahar community, required by Hindu law to perform menial work and avoid polluting contact with the upper classes". This is a clear example that Ambedkar's early life was indeed relatively predetermined, and did not provide many if any choices for him to make. His social standing from birth already determined his potential employment, he did not have the ability to make any choices in this stance, and thus it becomes clear that Ambedkar did indeed begin life in premodernity, according to Berger's definition of modernity.

However, Ambedkar grew up to break out of this premodern society, and becomes a prime example of Berger's modern man. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism, and upon leading the Untouchables leading up to

Indian independence, he began in through research into different possible religions that he could select from. And after through research he decides on and adopts Buddhism as his faith. Queen states this succinctly “one who rejected the sacred canopy of Hinduism, systematically studied the religious options available in India, and finally adopted Buddhism”. Queen even later states “deliberately choosing a religious faith from among the competing traditions in a richly pluralistic society”. From theses two excerpts from Queen, it is clear that Ambedkar did indeed become a modern man. He made an informed decision and used his freedom to select his own faith to adopt Buddhism, even with many other choices that he could have selected, he utilized his privilege as a modern man to select the faith that aligned most with his criteria.

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