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DRAWING PARALLELS BETWEEN GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR'S IDEA OF NATIONALISM

Dr. Karamala Areesh Kumar* **Dr. Anita. V***
**Teaches political science at St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Bangalore, Karnataka.*

Abstract
This article provides a brief outlook on Gandhi and Ambedkar's ideas of nation and nationalism. The concept of nation and nationalism is one of the major debates in contemporary Indian politics. In general, nationalism refers to one's devotion and love towards a country or nation based on either by birth or by choice. However, this concept of nationalism is very easy to assume but more difficult to demonstrate in the Indian context. In India nationalism is often associated with questions of personal, religious, regional and caste identity. Since the independence, multiple discourses are developed on Indian nationalism. Likewise, both Gandhi and Ambedkar had different views on nation and nationalism respectively. The main objective of this paper is to draw parallels between two great nationalist leaders and philosophers on the concept of Indian nationalism.

Keywords: Indian Nationalism, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Swaraj, Caste, Untouchability and Equality.

Introduction

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar were great leaders and social reformers of India but had different opinions on several political, economic and social issues such as caste, gram swaraj, nation and nationalism. Gandhi's construction of nationalism completely depends on his philosophy of swaraj and non-violence. His idea of nationalism is not only aimed at political independence from British colonialism but also associated with harmony, peace and tolerance. However, his ideas on swaraj and nationalism were comprehensively criticized by Ambedkar in his speeches and writings. Ambedkar perception of nationalism has questioned the mainstream conventional ideas by providing alternative understanding. He promoted subaltern nationalism which incorporates new perspectives like empowerment of oppressed communities. The subaltern nationalism is more inclusive and it advocates the deconstruction of traditional institutions based on caste hierarchy, which is consistently affecting the optimistic construction of the strong nation. According to Ambedkar, the construction of a nation should be based on liberty, equality, freedom, fraternity, and dignity of every individual. Social amalgamation between caste groups and intersectional ties between social democracy and human rights are necessary to form a nation. Most importantly Ambedkar designed the broader discourse of nationalism that encompassed the poorest of the poor. The nation in his idea was not just a territory rather it is a path to uphold equality, liberty, fraternity, and freedom.

Defining Nationalism

Defining nation, nationality and nationalism have proved disreputably difficult for scholars and thinkers in social sciences. However, this study examines the following definitions from different scholars to understand the concept of Nationalism. In Hans Kohn's view "*Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state*" (Kohn, 1969). Gellner argues that "*nationalism always depends on the shared values, rights, duties, and culture. According to him, if two men communicate in the same language, share the same ideas and culture, recognize each other mutual rights and duties is considered as a nation*" (Gellner, 1983). Anthony Smith defines nationalism as "*an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation*" (Smith,

2001).Benedict Anderson defines nationalism as "*an imagined political community*."According to him, *the concept of nation is imagined because the citizens of that particular nation don't have direct contacts or interaction with their fellow citizens, yet they have empathy and unity towards their community in their minds*" (Anderson, 2006). Based on the above definitions and observations; statehood, ethnicity, caste, religion, and natural environment including mountains and rivers are associated with the concept of nationalism.

Gandhi's Idea of Nationalism

Gandhism is based on foundation stones of truth and non-violence. He claimed that the truth and non-violence are the cementing factors for the making of a harmonious society as it restores mutual respect, admiration, compassion and accommodation that lead to the accommodative society.

Mahatma Gandhi's work, 'Hind Swaraj' depicts his views on Nation and Nationalism. Gandhi claims that India as a nation is based on two assumptions. The first is that India as a nation can accommodate plurality, diversity and dissenting voices and the second is that since the ancient period, India as a nation gave space for the evolution of nationalism by accommodating new values and ideas. Indian society continues to remain a melting pot of different religions, languages, cultures and others. To quote Gandhi,'India cannot cease to be one nation simply because people belonging to different religions live in it'. To understand Gandhi's perception of the nation one has to understand his views about religion. According to Gandhi, any religion has two parts. One is the core and the other in the periphery. The periphery of every religion consists of its social processes, practices, rituals and norms that respective followers of religion follow it. The core part of every religion constitutes the ethical principles and values that the religion holds. Though religions differ from one to another in terms of their explicit social processes, rituals and practices, the ethical values and principles that every religion holds remains the same. Once people realize this truth and understand the core of their respective religion all communal tensions, differences and conflicts will wither away thereby creating an accommodative society with a true sense of multiculturalism. According to Mahatma Gandhi, if religious and ethical values become a part of politics, as a result, most human problems will be automatically ended' (Hind Swaraj, 1909).

Gandhi placed religion as a central point in his notion of nationalism. In his opinion, "*India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation India has never been such a country. In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in a dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if only for their interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India"* (Hind Swaraj, 1909). This interpretation of Gandhi advocates the formation of a secular nation by advocating Hindu-Muslim unity (Habib, 2019).

Gandhi throughout the nationalist movement preached and practiced ethical principles that were deeply connected with morality and spirituality which affected the people's hearts and ignited the spirit of nationalism. According to Gandhi when one understands the core of their respective religion, that fills their heart with truth, non-violence, and love for humanity, self-confidence, sacrifice and morality.

These common threads run across all the religions capable of uniting the hearts of the people on common grounds evoking the spirit of nationalism. Gandhi stood as a testimonial not only for the faith on the ethical principles imparted by religion but also practically implemented them in the journey of national struggle. He took up the spiritual weapon of 'Satyagraha' that comprised of a strike against violence, social boycott and Swadeshi movement, dharma, civil disobedience and others. As these strategies were based on non-violence, truth and love for humanity, it was able to appeal to not only the fellow Indians but was also able to defeat the souls of opponents.

Gandhi also believed that political movement is incomplete without establishing social equality. He criticized social discrimination that creates stratification, differentiation and exploitation in society. He was strictly against untouchability and made his efforts to establish social equality in rural and urban areas of India that leads to an inclusive society. Gandhi referred to untouchables as Harijans and declared a fast against upper-caste domination and oppression in 1933 (Habib, 2019).He also focused on the decentralization of power that creates adequate spaces for people's participation so that people effectively exercise their political rights. It also creates economic opportunities for their development and makes them more self-reliant. Gandhi firmly believed that the struggle for political independence is incomplete without striving for establishing social and economic equality of people. According to Gandhi, 'All human beings should be given their rights, and they should also be uniformly treated. Only then the nationalism spirits will strengthen among the people, belonging to different strata of society (Rolland, 1923)'. Gandhi's idea of nation is also constructed based on the concept of the village and Gram Swaraj (Jodka, 2002). Gandhi's discourse of national independence is beyond freedom from British colonial rule. On the concept of Swaraj, he opined that "*there is need for patience. My views will develop of themselves in the course of this discourse. It is as difficult for me to understand the true nature of Swaraj as it seems to you to be easy. I shall, therefore, for the time being, content myself with endeavouring to show that what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj*" (Hind Swaraj, 1909). Hence, Gandhi's idea of nation is associated with Swaraj, Swadeshi and Satya (Heredia, 1999).

Gandhi made efforts to strengthen the nationalism spirit through economic, political, social and spiritual means as he was a firm believer that means justify ends and means are as important as ends. Through this, he wanted to establish 'Ram Rajya' for India where all differences (caste, class, colour, language, religion and sex) are ended. Ram Rajya is a place where everyone enjoys full liberty, equality, justice and true happiness. This Ram Rajya indeed be released if there is strive for developing multifaceted nationalism that creates social harmony and social stability in Indian society which was the dream of Mahatma.

Ambedkar's Thoughts on Nation and Nationalism

Ambedkar is well known as the father of the Indian constitution, philosopher, politician, educationist, sociologist, historian, and writer. But he was also a great nationalist. In Ambedkar's views "*nationality is a subjective psychological feeling. It is feelings of a corporate sentiment of oneness that makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. This national feeling is double-edged. It is at once a feeling of fellowship for one's kith and an anti-fellowship feeling for those who are not one's kith*" (Ambedkar, 1990).

For Ambedkar, freedom of country means freedom of the people. He links nationalism with equality, democracy and fraternity. He advocated internal freedom and independence from oppression. He opposed both upper-caste and British imperialism. Ambedkar idea of nationalism was constructed towards the upliftment and requirements of Dalits and other marginalized communities. The anti-

imperial and anti-caste approach was the foundation for Ambedkar's nationalism. Ambedkar's idea of nationalism challenged the upper-caste hegemony and hierarchical caste system.

In Ambedkar's view, a nation is not a sponsored entity; nations have to be constructed and created. According to him, the transformation of nationality to nationalism requires two conditions. Firstly, there must be willingness and desire from the people to live together. The second factor is the availability of a territory, which nationalism could occupy and form a state, which will be considered as a cultural home of the nation (Ambedkar, 1990). He further argues that there is the existence of caste consciousness among every Hindu, which divides the society. Due to this reason, Hindus are not able to form a strong nation (Ambedkar, 2014). According to Ambedkar, every caste in India is a separate nation. In 1927, Ambedkar expressed his views on Nationalism in *Bahishkrit Bharat*[i] by saying, "*If Tilak had been born among the untouchables, he would not have raised the slogan 'Swaraj*[ii] *is my birth-right', but he would have raised the slogan 'Annihilation of untouchability is my birth-right'*" (Bite, 2012).

In his book "Annihilation of Caste", Ambedkar argued that *Swaraj without the annihilation of caste has no meaning*. He further said *"in my opinion, only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strengthened enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, Swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery*" (Ambedkar, 2014).

According to Ambedkar, the formation of a strong Indian nation depends on social amalgamation. In his speeches, he stated that "*I do not agree with Mr. Gandhi and the Congress when they say that India is a nation. I do not agree either with the foreign relations committee of the Muslim League when they say that Hindus and Muslims could not be welded together into a nation. I believe that we are not a nation. But my confident hope is that we can be a nation provided proper processes of social amalgamation are set forth"*. He argues that Indian society is divided into different castes, sub-castes, religions and cultural groups. India has not yet become a nation. Ambedkar believed that equality, liberty and fraternity among the people are necessary to form an Indian nation (Ambedkar, 2003).

Many Hindu and Congress nationalist leaders during the freedom struggle criticised Ambedkar's views on nationalism and referred to him as anti-national. In his speeches, Ambedkar replied them "*I am no opponent of a national government. I am no opponent of Swaraj. I am no opponent of independence. We were never against our country getting independence. But we want a straight answer to only one question. What will be our fate in free India? I posed that question before Gandhiji and other Congress leaders. Only one question is: what will be the position of our people in Swaraj? Whether we will remain the same Bhangis and Chamars as we are today; whether our children will not be admitted to the schools in the same way as it being done now; and our people will have to suffer as they are suffering now in the villages? What will happen to our people? At the round table conference, this question was again raised, whether we want swaraj or not*" (Ambedkar, 1991 and 2003).

Ambedkar's notion of nationalism promotes social democracy by strengthening the unity of the people. Based on the foundations of subaltern nationalism, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar constructed an alternative approach to Indian nationalism, which we can refer to as social or egalitarian nationalism. The establishment of a casteless and classless society, where no one would be discriminated, based on their birth, gender, religion and occupation, was the main aim of Ambedkar's nationalism. In this regard, Ambedkar had taken several initiatives to construct a strong and modern Indian Nation.

As a chairman of the Drafting Committee, he incorporated several provisions in the Indian Constitution to strengthen his notion of nationalism. The Right to Equality (Article: 14), Prohibition of Untouchability (Article: 17), Right to Freedom (Article: 19), and Right to Religion (Article 25-28) under Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution aimed to strengthen Ambedkar's egalitarian nationalism based on equality, liberty and fraternity (Constitution of India, 2015).

Conclusion: Parallels between Gandhi and Ambedkar

Gandhi shared good personal relations with all his contemporary leaders including Nehru, Tagore, Jinnah and Ambedkar (Singh, 2014). Gandhi and Ambedkar emerged as great social reformers and philosophers during India's independence movement. Despite fundamental differences on several issues, both stood for a democratic, sovereign, classless and casteless Indian nation. However, several times Ambedkar expressed his differences and criticised Gandhi and even refused to call him Mahatma. But this criticism of Ambedkar was limited to a particular political context such as Poona Pact. Even though they followed different paths and ideologies, both advocated similar goals of emancipation of women, abolition of untouchability and the secular Indian nation. But the differences between the followers of Gandhi and Ambedkar created an Anti-Gandhi and Anti-Ambedkarite discourse in the academics (Singh, 2014).

Gandhi and Ambedkar's ideas on nationalism are very relevant to the present debate on nation and nationalism. Gandhian concept of nationalism promoted swaraj, religious harmony, tolerance, peace and brotherhood; whereas Ambedkar's idea of nationalism is based on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Gandhi and Ambedkar advocated a plural and secular nation by advocating the abolition of untouchability and protecting minorities. They also believed that without social amalgamation, India can never become a strong nation. Both opined that religion plays a significant role in the formation of a stronger nation. Gandhi advocated Ram Rajya through the moral and ethical conduct of Hinduism; whereas Ambedkar promoted the formation *Prabuddha-Bharat*[iii], which he developed from Buddhist philosophy.

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Notes

[i]Bahishkrit Bharat (Excluded India) was a newspaper started by Dr. Ambedkar in 1929 to address the problems of untouchables.
[ii]Swaraj is a self-governing or home-rule movement led by Dayanand Saraswathi and M. K. Gandhi against British rule in India.
[iii]Prabuddha-Bharat (Enlightened India) was a Journal established by Dr. Ambedkar in 1930 as Janata, later in 1956, he renamed it, Prabuddha Bharat, to start the Neo-Buddhist movement in India.