

## Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Idea of Nationalism and His Role in Making India a United Nation

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### Abstract:

*Nationalism, in a wider sense, is any complex of attitudes, claims and directives for action ascribing a fundamental political, moral, cultural value to nations and nationality and deriving special obligations and permissions from this ascribed value. In view of Dr. Ambedkar, nationalism means expression of inner unity of a people and it is a process of social assimilation. Therefore, irrespective of caste, colour and creed, nationalism gets perfect harmony if social brotherhood of men prevails everywhere within a nation. To Ambedkar, nationalism is negation of caste spirit and caste spirit is nothing but deep-rooted communalism. He emphasized to fight against casteism, linguism, communalism and separatism because he was of the opinion that these social evils divide the people into small social units which are against the spirit of nationalism. In view of Ambedkar, communalism being one form of groupism is a threat to national integration which may hamper the way for equality and fraternity. Ambedkar viewed nationalism as a spiritual phenomenon rooted in humanism. To Ambedkar, patriotism and nationalism are of utmost need for democracy and equality. Ambedkar's view regarding this is that patriotism demand action in right direction and reaction against all wrong and a nationalist leader should have deep faith in himself to eradicate imperialism, social tyranny, casteism, communalism, forced labour etc. In a word, Ambedkar's idea of nationalism creates a spirit of social brotherhood, feeling of oneness and a firm determination to improve the lot of people who remain oppressed in the same country. B.R. Ambedkar's notion of nationalism*

*has rarely received adequate academic consideration either from the liberal or radical scholars and the historians in India. This paper attempts to discuss Dr. Ambedkar's idea of Nationalism and his role in making India a united nation.*

**Key words:** Nationalism, Communalism, Casteism, Lingualism, Democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

Bharat Ratna Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), affectionately known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was undoubtedly one of the illustrious son of India. He appeared on the Indian socio-political scene in the early 1920s and remained at the forefront of the social, cultural, economic and political transformation of India during the closing decades of the British Rule. After India got freedom in 1947, Dr. Ambedkar played a very significant role in laying the foundation of modern India till his death in 1956. Dr. Ambedkar was a great social reformer, a valiant champion of human rights and an emancipator of the downtrodden masses of India, who dedicated all his life to awaken the social conscience of modern India (Jadhav, N. 2014). His life is an incredible saga: an untouchable boy, humiliated every step of the way from childhood to youth, beats all odds securing the highest and most reputable degrees from the world class universities- MA and PhD in Economics from Columbia University, USA and DSc in Economics from London School of Economics besides Bar-at-Law degree from London, UK. Ambedkar's notion of a democratic nation and nationalism appears to be quite unprecedented on Indian subcontinent in colonial era.

The genesis of both the terms 'Democracy' and 'Nation' lies in Europe and the rest of the world have imported them as per their needs and suitability. But European society unlike Indian society was never in the trap of socially ascriptive

hierarchy (Caste division) and therefore, in spite of the early emergence of a plethora of theories in Europe on "Democracy" and "Nationalism", the caste question was never included. European and even American theories of *democracy* and *nationalism* dealt with only those questions of primordial identities which their societies were faced with, for instance, race, religion, minority rights and so on rather than caste. The whole question of caste as a socio-political problem remained specific to India for which Europe and America had no answer at least in colonial period. Gandhi took up the *Caste Question* in the reformist and status quo-ist manner by conserving the Varna system and the Congress socialists suppressed the question itself by not regarding it worth discussing and instead preferred to discuss and govern through rather refined European ideologies. Congress nationalism therefore could be recriminated of neglecting this question persistently. It was in the backdrop of this escapist attitude of Congress nationalism that an alternative subalternist political nationalism was born in Ambedkar. Ambedkar took up this question from social below and elevated it to political high by linking this social question of caste with the political question of democracy and nationalism. Such an effort to prioritize society over polity and then linking them together was unprecedented in India before Ambedkar. Gandhi can be said to have made such an effort but his approach was obscure and primitive as it ended up in anarchy wherein society would self-sufficiently continue without any need for state.

## **AMBEDKAR ON NATIONALITY AND NATIONALISM**

In view of Ambedkar, nationalism means expression of inner unity of a people and it is a process of social assimilation. Therefore, irrespective of caste, colour and creed, nationalism gets perfect harmony if social brotherhood of men prevails everywhere within a nation. To Ambedkar, nationalism is

negation of caste spirit and caste spirit is nothing but deep-rooted communalism. He emphasized to fight against casteism, linguism, communalism and separatism because he was of the opinion that these social evils divide the people into small social units which are against the spirit of nationalism. In view of Ambedkar, communalism being one form of groupism is a threat to national integration which may hamper the way for equally and fraternity. In short, Ambedkar viewed nationalism as a spiritual phenomenon rooted in humanism.

According to Ambedkar, 'nationalism' in relation to a nation should be based on a strong feeling of social unity and in relation to 'internationalism', the human brotherhood. And such nationalism, fraught with the spirit of democracy, would not base itself upon a tyranny nor would it ever be a menace to any community and nation. There is a distinction between a community and a nation. Ambedkar quotes Sidgewick on the distinction between the two: 'A community has a right to safeguard; a nation has a right to demand separation'.

In this regard, the subtle distinctions, to Ambedkar's acumen, between 'nationality' and 'nation' must be noted down. While 'nationality' implies "consciousness of kin, awareness of the existence of that tie of kinship; 'nationalism' implies the desire for a separate national existence for those who are bound by this tie of kinship". Nationalism, to Ambedkar, cannot exist without the feeling of nationality. However, nationality does not in all cases produce nationalism. Here Oneil Biswas finds two points worth mentioning: first, nationality is a dynamic expression of the desire to live as a nation; and secondly that there ought to be a territory which nationalism can occupy and make it a state and also a cultural home of the nation. Ambedkar also goes ahead to draw a line between the freedom of the country and freedom of the people and it is the latter which is more important of the two. Thus he takes pain to exhibit that without the freedom of the people, nationalism becomes a means of internal/domestic slavery, forced labor and

organized tyranny for the poor and servile classes. According to him, "it is entirely wrong to concentrate all our attention on the political independence of our country, and to forget the far more serious problem of social and economic independence. It is suicidal to imagine that political independence necessarily means real all-sided freedom".

Ambedkar writes in his book 'Thoughts on Pakistan (1940), -

'there is a difference between nationality and nationalism. They are two different psychological states of the human mind. Nationality means "consciousness of kind, awareness of the existence of that tie of kinship." Nationalism means "the desire for a separate national existence for those who are bound by this tie of kinship." Secondly, it is true that there cannot be nationalism without the feeling of nationality being in existence. But, it is important to bear in mind that the converse is not always true. The feeling of nationality may be present and yet the feeling of nationalism may be quite absent. That is to say, nationality does not in all cases produce nationalism. For nationality to flame into nationalism two conditions must exist. First, there must arise the "will to live as a nation." Nationalism is the dynamic expression of that desire. Secondly, there must be a territory which nationalism could occupy and make it a state, as well as a cultural home of the nation. Without such a territory, nationalism, to use Lord Acton's phrase, would be a "soul as it were wandering in search of a body in which to begin life over again and dies out finding none." The Muslims have developed a "will to live as a nation." For them nature has found a territory which they can occupy and make it a state as well as a cultural home for the new-born Muslim nation. Given these favourable conditions, there should be no wonder, if the Muslims say that they are not content to occupy the position which the French choose to occupy in Canada or the English choose to occupy in South Africa, and that they shall have a national home which they can call their own'.

Apart from the socio-political aspects of nationalism, Ambedkar, being a realist in his approach, was very much aware of the fact that any nationalism based on social justice would remain a myth if not linked legally to constitutional forces. Keeping it in mind, Ambedkar took all the pains to translate his notion of social justice and nationalism into legal terminology. Justice K. Ramaswamy while probing into the legal aspects of nationalism likes to call Ambedkar a true democrat, a nationalist to the core and a patriot of highest order on various grounds. He was the author and principal actor to make the 'Directive Principles' as part of the constitutional scheme. When it was criticized that the directive principles could not be enforced in a court of law, and hence there would be no need to have them incorporated in the Constitution, Ambedkar answered that though they were not enforceable, the succeeding majority political party in Parliament or Legislative Assembly would be bound by them as an inbuilt part of their economic programme in the governance, despite their policy in its manifesto and are bound by the Constitution. Ambedkar, in his Constitutional schema of nationalism, undertook the task of strengthening the Executive in particular and the notion of 'Integrated Bharat' in general.

## **DR. AMBEDKAR ON LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM**

Ambedkar, after a realistic analysis of the problem of linguism and its implications, arrived at some definite conclusions concerning the structure and organization of states, the component units of the Indian federation. Ambedkar firmly believes that in general, 'one state, one language' is a universal feature of almost every state - Germany, France, Italy, England, U.S.A etc., in the Western hemisphere. It is a general 'rule' and not a 'dogma' wherever there has been a departure from this rule; there has been a danger to the state. The danger of disintegration and degeneration is inherent in multilingual

states. He says that India cannot escape this fate if it continues to be a congerie of mixed states. A multilingual state is thus unstable and a unilingual state is stable. A state, Ambedkar says, is built on 'fellow-feeling'. It is a feeling of a 'corporate sentiment of oneness'. This is one reason why a linguistic state is so essential, viz, why a state should be unilingual. There are also two other reasons why the rule 'one state, one language' is necessary to Ambedkar. One, in democracy fellow-feeling is essential. Fellow-feeling in democracy is necessarily accompanied by opposition without which a democracy cannot work. But in a multilingual state, 'friction' (opposition) may be replaced by 'faction' and faction fights for leadership may bring as a result discrimination in administration. These factors are ever present in a mixed state and are incompatible with democracy. The next reason as to why their rule be applied is that is the only solvent to racial and cultural conflicts. The different people speaking different languages when put together in a government are bound to go in different directions. Their racial and cultural interests are separate and there will be little possibility of peace between them. Therefore the mixed state is always a danger to both parties, for one may dominate the other and vice versa. Applying the same rule to Indian scenario, Ambedkar says that it would be better if India follows the road of linguistic states. However the major difficulty is that a linguistic state with its regional language may easily develop into an independent state. Unfortunately, if this happens, India would be parceled out into a number of small states, as had happened in the medieval period. This may result into rivalry and warfare. If the whole country is divided into linguistic states, such a danger is almost certain. This is why the better way out is, suggests Ambedkar, to provide that the regional language shall not be the official language of the state. He suggests that the official language of the whole nation should be Hindi. Otherwise, the creation of linguistic states may badly affect national unity, peace and prosperity. The

formula of 'one state, one language' can unite the people. Two languages in a mixed state are sure to divide them. Again it is an 'inexorable law' that 'culture is conserved by language'. And we wish to "unite and develop a common culture, it is the bounden duty of all Indians to own up Hindi as their language.

### **AMBEDKAR'S DEMAND FOR A STRONG CENTER TO KEEP INDIA UNITED**

Dr. Ambedkar in his very first speech in the Constituent Assembly on 17 December 1946 had emphasized the need for creating a strong Center in order to ensure that India's freedom was not jeopardized as had happened in the past on account of a weak central administration. His view was hailed by the Assembly and came later to be reflected in the Emergency Provisions of the Constitution. Undoubtedly the states are sovereign in normal times but by virtue of these provisions, the Center becomes all-powerful and assumes control over all affairs of the nation whenever a situation arises which poses a danger to the security of the state. In other words, once a Proclamation of Emergency is issued, the whole system of administration, which is basically federal in character, is transformed into a unitary system for all practical purposes. On 3 August 1949, Ambedkar suggested the insertion of a new Article, namely, "177-A", which reads as follows: "It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every state is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this constitution".

Justifying the insertion of the new Article, he said: "some people might think that Article '277-A' is merely a pious declaration that it ought not to be there. I think it is agreed that our Constitution, notwithstanding the many provisions which are contained in it whereby the Center has given powers to override the provinces, nonetheless is a Federal Constitution

and when we say that the Constitution is a Federal Constitution, it means this that the provinces are as sovereign in their field which is left to them by the Constitution as the Center is in the field which is assigned to it. In other words, barring the provisions, which permit the Center to override any legislation that may be passed by the provinces, the provinces have a plenary authority to make any law for the peace, order and good government of the province; really speaking, the intervention of the Center must be deemed to be barred because that would be an invasion of the sovereign authority of the province. This is a fundamental proposition of a Federal Constitution, if the Center is to interfere in the administration of provincial affairs, it must be by and under some obligations which the Constitution imposes on the Center. The invasion must not be wanton, arbitrary and unauthorized by law".

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