

## **Interpreting Ambedkar's concept of Nationalism**

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India has been facing a severe social crisis today than ever before. Whatever advancement it has made during the last seventy years in bringing about a social harmony got terribly derailed in the past few years. The whipping up of communal and casteist forces for political reasons has posed an unprecedented challenge to the democratic nature of our social system. This demands an introspection into the concept of nation building as aspired by Dr.Ambedkar in order that the unabated damage could be checked. At a time when the country is facing troubles born out of cultural differences its essential to understand the thoughts of Dr.Ambedkar on developing India into a strong nation.

India is one of the world's richest countries for its social and cultural diversity. The diversity was characterized by the presence of conflicting schools of thought, cultures, communities, religions and regions. This made India a complex social system that forced Dr.Ambedkar to undertake a massive exercise of writing the world's biggest constitution corresponding to its diverse requirements. While writing the constitution there were two significant aspects in front of him: one, preserving the diversity and its beauty on one hand and bringing about harmony among the conflicting entities. To achieve this equilibrium he appeared to have chosen the constitution as an appropriate means. The constitution of India he drafted made every possible attempt to abolish discrimination in all walks of life and sustain the multicultural nature of society. He envisioned national integrity by foregrounding liberty, equality and fraternity in the backdrop of diversities.

He understood that to make India a nation requires fraternity among its members ,and of course it was hugely disrupted by the presence caste based discrimination. Dr.Ambedkar's perception that India was not yet a nation was a radical revelation of the existing reality, perhaps, a fact valid even today. It's also a contradiction to the popular imagination of India as a nation. Though there was a national movement sweeping across the country he had enough reasons to herald that a country that was divided into thousands of castes, like rival camps India, with confronting interests could never become a nation, was to drive the attention towards making people realize the truth. His conviction that *nationalism was 'a corporate sentiment of oneness and a feeling of blood relationship* should be understood as a necessity in the backdrop of competing caste and religious interests which could pose a grave threat to the integrity of India. Thus the constitution laid down a clear road map to build up institutions and governance system to achieve the top most objective i.e. social harmony in society.

Perhaps it was why Prof. Granville Austin termed the constitution "*first and foremost a social document embedded with the objectives of a social revolution*".

For Dr. Ambedkar there is a correlation between national integrity and; liberty, equality and equality. This is visible when he presented the principle of equality as the first fundamental right in our constitution unlike other constitutions of the world that made *right to life* as their first fundamental right. This approach has a significant implication which indicates that life without equality is meaningless. Similarly his philosophy emphasize that unity is not possible as long as there is inequality, indignity and discrimination since a huge human segment masses who got excluded would pose a challenge to it. It's a warning to those who could not even tolerate their fellow citizens for reasons of caste but often pose themselves as patriots. In other words he was indicating that an oppressor of the fellow citizens in the name of caste, could never become a patriot. Now it's for the so called patriots to decide whether they are qualified to be called so. The situation is intact even today and Ambedkar was right when he argued that much bigger a threat to the nation is with the caste system than the neighboring countries.

Sadly, whatever level playing mechanisms offered by him for social balance in the country were either grossly misunderstood or rejected. Separate settlements, state socialism and separate electorate fall under this category. Separate settlements, where the entire village would consist of only Dalits could have been wonderful means for dalit liberation. The cases of Sankuvanikunta and Santaravuru villages of Prakasam and Badepuram and Mulapalem village of Guntur districts of AP offers fitting examples for his vision. These villages have no upper castes presence in them, as such no oppression for Dalits. The progress made by Dalits of these villages in terms of education, land resources, employment, self respect and above all overcoming the socially imposed self-pity (inferior complex) provides a model to for the government be followed.

However, reservation in employment and education is one such significant attempt intended to include the historically marginalized groups who constitute a significant chunk of Indian population. By providing this relief he could save the country from brewing a civil war like situation as the reservation initiated the inclusive process. In the absence of such a relief India would have plunged into a severe crisis with the growing consciousness of the deprived. Therefore, it should be understood here that reservations for him was one of the principal instruments for social integration than a mere economic support. Also, his thought brings out a fact that the dalit question is more concerned with self-respect than an economic integration. Till today, nobody could provide an alternative to reservations to integrate the marginalized proves it beyond doubt. The antagonists of reservation should understand that Dr. Ambedkar saved the country from plunging into a Somalia like situation with reservations.

Liberty provided in the constitution of India should be understood as an instrument of non-intervention by the state and individuals into one's cultural domain with a rider of decency, health and

public morality. This is seen essential to prevent unnecessary conflicts in society. By contrast often interventions into dress, food, faith related matters are becoming source of clashes despite the constitutional norms support them. To overcome such problems Ambedkar prescribed democracy in its all forms to be followed in all walks of life. But somehow for the last few years democracy in India has been put to peril by the traditional forces. Attempts were witnessed to dilute the spirit of the plural nature of the nation. Democracy being the bedrock of our constitution it is the responsibility of the state and society to preserve it by all means failing which India would further plunge into new complexities. The prudence of Ambedkar reveals that fighting out enemies of the outside is much easier if there is solidarity within and solidarity should be born out from a feeling of fraternity. His argument that in the absence of fraternity- liberty and equality are always at tension -perfectly fits into the present crisis of our country. A society that has been divided on the lines of graded inequality needs to learn how to wipe out the caste ridden inhuman practices if it desires to develop into a true nation. If nationalism is reduced to the level of a strategy of a political party nothing would be dangerous to our country than it. Unless we understand and implement the concept of nationalism in the way Dr. Ambedkar has envisioned, it is impossible to develop the physical boundaries of a geographical location into an emotional nation.

If understood properly we could find every bit of our constitution is abundantly stuffed with required ideals to build India into a strong nation. Positive discrimination and untouchability should be understood as means to integrate the downtrodden into the main stream society as their exclusion would fail to make us a nation. Denial of opportunities and access -on grounds of race, religion, sex, place of birth is to ensure equality which could avoid a sense of difference needed for the national unity. So is secularism. Rights to safeguard different cultures were intended to infuse a feeling of security from the domination of numerical majority. In fact several countries of the west have to evolve an ideology called multiculturalism which is inbuilt in our constitution. It is to ensure the ideal of liberty to different cultural groups as oppression could prove counterproductive. Thus every bit of our constitution attempts to prove the significance of liberty, equality and fraternity required for making India a strong nation. If we flesh out the ideas inherent in Ambedkar's constitutional vision by ignoring the noble values of liberty, equality and fraternity, it would undoubtedly pose a serious danger to the national integration. Thus the idea of nationalism as expounded by Ambedkar refers to an emotional relationship among people devoid of caste discrimination. He was right in advocating it as even after decades of independence India is still struggling with lack of a true nationalist bond among its members in the backdrop of caste conflicts.

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