

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic interactions between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar significantly shaped India's path to nation-building. While both leaders envisioned an independent India, their ideologies on social, political, and economic issues diverged significantly. Gandhi, the champion of non-violence and rural self-reliance, believed in addressing social reforms through moral regeneration and the upliftment of the marginalized within traditional structures. Ambedkar, on the other hand, advocated for systemic change, focusing on the eradication of caste and the establishment of legal frameworks to guarantee the rights of the oppressed. This paper explores the contributions of both figures to the Indian nation-building process, highlighting the ideological tensions between their approaches to democracy, social justice, and the future of the Indian state.

Keywords:

Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, Nation-building

INTRODUCTION

India's journey to independence and subsequent nation-building was shaped by multiple ideologies and leaders. Two prominent figures in this regard were Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Gandhi, known for his philosophy of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and advocacy for self-reliant village communities, played a pivotal role in uniting diverse groups in the struggle for independence. However, his ideas about social structure, particularly regarding caste, were challenged by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who emerged as a staunch advocate for the rights of the oppressed, particularly the Dalits (formerly known as untouchables). Ambedkar believed that true freedom could not be achieved without social equality, and he criticized Gandhi's methods of social reform, advocating instead for structural changes through legal and constitutional means.

This paper explores the contrasting yet complementary roles played by Gandhi and Ambedkar in shaping modern India. While Gandhi focused on the moral and spiritual regeneration of society, Ambedkar emphasized institutional reform and legal guarantees to ensure equality for all citizens. Their differing views on key issues like caste, democracy, and the role of the state offer valuable insights into the complexities of India's nation-building process.

THE NATION AND CASTE IN INDIA

The concept of caste is an Indian-only phenomena. It has strong roots in Indian civilisation that spans many generations. It now functions as a social institution with a variety of techniques. Put differently,

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

caste may be seen as the evolution of social stratification and as a strategic feature inside Indian society's social institutions. One may challenge the definition of the term "caste" in relation to the idea of caste in this chapter. What is its history, and how does it manifest itself in Indian society? Does Varn [1] signify caste? Or it's kept apart from it. If Varna is the same as caste, then how did Varna come to be and where did it come from? However, how is Varna isolated from other forms if it is split off from caste? Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate the many ways that caste was manipulated in Indian culture. Does it fit with the present Indian culture? What role does caste play in the formation of a country and is it necessary for a nation to be healthy?

Whereas the second is vertical and intense, the first is lateral and vast. In the first, communities are seen to stretch raggedly and imprecisely in space, but they seldom pierce deeply into the social scale. "Lateral" ethnic groups are often aristocratic, however they may also include some of the wealthiest urban merchants as well as members of the clerical and scribe layers. Alternatively, 'vertical' ethnic groups are loose alliances of tribesmen led by their clan chiefs, united for battle and later assimilating or coexisting with a dominant if primitive state and its monarch. Equally typically, these groups are urban-based, priestly, trading, and artisan in their composition, with their ruling strata often thrown up from the wealthy and powerful factions in the towns. Either way, their relationship is more intense and exclusive than that of the lateral, aristocratic ethnic group, which is why it often has a strongly religious, even missionary, flavour.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMBEDKAR AND GANDHIJI

Periodically, the world has seen the rise of great spirits who have guided humanity towards knowledge and taught us how to strive for an ideal lifestyle. Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar, two great leaders, may have had a common vedic ancestry given their shared emphasis on the welfare of the impoverished and oppressed [2].

The four vams—the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras—formed the basis of Hindu social structure prior to their arrival. Manu established this four-fold division of society, which is known as Chaturvarna. This system determined the social and economic standing of Hindus based on where they were born. They were not given the option to choose their careers [3]. The divisive nature of Hindu culture has given rise to many grave issues, including emotions of euphoria and depression, attitudes of superiority and inferiority, injustice, and suffering. A subset of Hindus saw the other subgroups as inferior, subordinate citizens or as slaves. The lowest castes experienced harassment, depression, and suppression.

Several deserving Indian boys have dedicated their time and abilities to eliminating these societal ills. The first attempt was made by Buddha 25 hundred years ago. Basava battled against the caste system in the twelfth century. Saints such as Kabir, Chaitanya, Eknath, and Tukaram dedicated their lives to counselling and reforming the diverse Hindu communities in various regions of the nation.

The Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati and the Brahma Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy paved the way for change in the customs of traditional Hindu culture. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda and Jyotirao Phule battled against the antiquated caste system. The Theosophical Society, also known as the Prathan Society, Satyashodhak Society, and other societies, served Indian society and symbolised

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

the dynamic activities of notable reformers such as Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi are two of the greatest social reformers in Indian history. While Dr. Ambedkar's efforts were mostly political and legal in nature, Mahatma Gandhi's endeavours were primarily spiritual and devotional [4].

It was only natural for Hindus who studied liberal philosophy and democratic institutions in the west to rebel against caste-based beliefs. Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhiji's contributions embodied the first stirrings of social reformation in India.

In 1891, Ambedkar was born. Convulsive disagreements, misunderstandings, and confrontations were prevalent during this period in Indian civilisation. During Ambedkar's formative years, the nation was experiencing significant, revolutionary transformations. These uneasy decades gave rise to nationalist groups, which were a political manifestation of the underlying aspirations and ideals of Indian society, the economy, and culture. The untouchable segments of Indian society were not satisfied with the typically slow rate of social progress.

Ambedkar has been acclaimed as the nation's emancipator of the downtrodden classes. He dominated Indian politics at a pivotal moment when the country was experiencing a wave of political upheavals. He acquired a little package of political rights and freedoms for the despondent Shudra community in addition to securing significant rights and liberties for the nation's underprivileged. With degrees from the world's most prestigious colleges under his belt, he was well-versed in a wide range of sciences as well as the constitutions and legal systems of many countries. He was a brilliant academic, a legendary figure in the legal world, a master of constitutional law, a member of parliament, a politician, a potent writer, a journalist, a judge, and, most importantly, a rescuer of the downtrodden segments of Indian society. About Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. Vincent Sheean states the following: "He had the following degrees: M.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., and LL.B. Degrees may not signify much, yet inside his speaking, enormous chunks and swirling avatars of learning emerged. Even though he wasn't the best Sanskrit scholar, he was nonetheless able to include several allusions to the early Hindu authorities in a book.

Ambedkar advocated for opposing Manu's ideologies. Manu established laws, customs, and guidelines that were intended to subjugate two groups of people: women and Shudras. It is concerning but accurate to say that Ambedkar adopted Buddhism by endorsing a branch of Hinduism that belonged to the Shudras and contradicted the institutions and teachings of Brahminical Hinduism. It's also important to remember that Mahatma Gandhi was greatly influenced by Buddhism throughout his life.

EACH OF US IS A PATRIOT

With good reason, Mahatma Gandhi has been acclaimed as India's patriot monk and liberation warrior. Upon seeing the many social ills plaguing Indian society, he resolved to fight for the nation's independence and the elimination of these ills. He begged for a comprehensive overhaul of the inflexible caste system and expressed regret for the nation's downfall. Being a great patriot himself, Dr. Ambedkar worked tirelessly to rebuild the nation's strength and togetherness throughout his life. He also consistently offered workable answers to the many issues facing the nation. Dr. Ambedkar

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

stated, "I believe that the most important thing that needs to be done right now is to instill in the majority of people a sense of a shared national identity, a sense that they are Indians first and Indians last, rather than Hindus, Muslims, Sindhis, or Kanarese afterward. If that is the objective, then nothing that might strengthen local pride and group awareness should be done." [6] Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar had useful suggestions for overcoming the forces of division that exist in a nation such as India. The strategies that Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar used to better the condition of the Indian people were divergent. Mahatma Gandhiji wished for India to become a strong, unified country by using the ideas of humanistic philosophy to address all of its issues. Ambedkar disagreed with this approach since humanistic and man-making philosophy taught that God is everywhere and resides among the destitute and impoverished. However, Mahatma Gandhiji observed that Hindus treated the poor and destitute unfairly and that they should not give up their faith in order to benefit society. It implies that our society has to eradicate casteism and untouchability. Ambedkar said that this was challenging as Hindu adherents persisted in using casteist ideologies and practices in the social and political domains.

GANDHI'S NATIONALISM: SATYAGRAHA AND INCLUSIVE UNITY

Often referred to as the "Father of the Nation," Mahatma Gandhi envisioned a nationalism based on truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa), which would be inclusive and spiritual. His strategy, dubbed satyagraha, was a nonviolent resistance movement that used passive resistance and civil disobedience to advance social and political objectives. Gandhi's nationalism and his moral and ethical convictions were closely related; he greatly drew on his Hindu faith and the idea of Sarvodaya, or the benefit of all people [6].

Non-violence and Civil Disobedience: Gandhi believed that true nationalism could not be achieved through violent means. He argued that violence begets more violence, and only through non-violent resistance could India achieve true independence and moral legitimacy.

Religious Harmony: Gandhi's vision of nationalism emphasized the unity of India's diverse religious communities. He sought to bridge the gaps between Hindus and Muslims, advocating for communal harmony as essential for a united India.

Village Swaraj: Gandhi's idea of self-reliance extended to his vision of self-governance. He promoted the concept of village self-sufficiency and rural development, believing that India's strength lay in its villages.

Inclusive Nationalism: Gandhi's nationalism was inclusive, aiming to integrate all sections of society, including the marginalized and oppressed. However, his methods and ideas were sometimes seen as paternalistic, particularly by those who felt that his approach did not address structural inequalities adequately.

AMBEDKAR'S NATIONALISM: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND LEGAL REFORM

A key figure in the creation of the Indian Constitution and a well-known representative of the Dalits, often known as Untouchables, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar envisioned a nationalism based on equality, social justice, and legal reform. Ambedkar's nationalism was pragmatic; it was centered on fighting for the

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

rights of the disadvantaged and tearing down the deeply ingrained caste system [7].

Critique of Social Inequality: Ambedkar's primary critique of Indian society was its deeply ingrained caste system, which he saw as antithetical to true nationalism. He argued that political independence would be meaningless without social and economic equality [8].

Constitutionalism and Legal Rights: Unlike Gandhi's emphasis on moral persuasion, Ambedkar believed in the power of constitutional and legal frameworks to bring about social change. He was instrumental in drafting the Indian Constitution, ensuring that it enshrined fundamental rights and protections for all citizens, especially the marginalized.

Economic Emancipation: Ambedkar's nationalism extended to economic reforms. He advocated for land reforms, industrialization, and policies that would ensure economic opportunities for the oppressed classes.

Secularism and Rationalism: Ambedkar was a strong proponent of secularism and rational thought. He was critical of the role of religion in perpetuating social inequalities and argued for a separation of religion from politics.

POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

While Gandhi and Ambedkar shared a common goal of an independent and prosperous India, their paths diverged significantly [9].

Means to Achieve Goals: Gandhi's reliance on non-violence and moral persuasion contrasted with Ambedkar's belief in legal and constitutional measures. Ambedkar was skeptical of Gandhi's methods, viewing them as insufficient to address the deep-seated issues of caste and social inequality.

Role of Religion: Gandhi's nationalism was deeply spiritual and sought to harmonize religious communities, while Ambedkar, though initially aligned with Hindu reform movements, ultimately converted to Buddhism as a rejection of the caste system inherent in Hinduism.

Social Hierarchy: Gandhi's approach to social reform was gradual and aimed at moral transformation, whereas Ambedkar demanded immediate and concrete legal reforms to dismantle the caste hierarchy.

Economic Views: Gandhi's vision of a self-sufficient rural economy contrasted with Ambedkar's advocacy for industrialization and economic modernization as means to uplift the marginalized sections of society.

IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR

Approach to Social Reforms

Gandhi believed in a comprehensive approach to social reforms, where social reform could not be separated from political freedom. He emphasized the importance of village life and the upliftment of the downtrodden. Gandhi's focus was on self-reliance, swadeshi, and the empowerment of all segments of society [10].

Ambedkar placed a strong emphasis on social equality and the eradication of caste-based

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

discrimination. He advocated for the rights and upliftment of the Dalits. Ambedkar believed that social integration and reform could be achieved through education.

Perspectives on Democracy

Gandhi and Ambedkar had differing views on the nature and scope of democracy as a method of government. Gandhi was skeptical of mass democracy. He feared that it could lead to domination by leaders and a loss of individual freedoms. He preferred a decentralized form of governance that prioritized local self-rule and community participation.

Ambedkar had a more optimistic view of mass democracy. He believed that by empowering the marginalized communities, pressure could be built up for their advancement within the democratic framework. Ambedkar saw democracy as a means to achieve social justice and equal representation for all sections of society.

Views on Religion and Caste

Gandhi and Ambedkar acknowledged the role of religion in social change. However, they had different perspectives on its significance. Gandhi believed in the importance of religion as an agent of social transformation. He sought to reform and purify Hinduism. He advocated for equality and the elimination of social evils within the religion.

Ambedkar approached religion from a more critical standpoint. He called for the reorganization of Hindu society based on principles of equality and the absence of caste. Ambedkar emphasized the separation of state and religion. He advocated for freedom of religion and citizenship.

Attitudes towards Political Systems

Gandhi and Ambedkar had contrasting views on the political systems they envisioned for independent India. Gandhi was skeptical of parliamentary democracy and preferred a decentralized model of governance. He believed in the wisdom of the people and the need for a constitution suited to the Indian genius, free from external influences.

Ambedkar supported a parliamentary system of government. He saw it as a way to ensure representation and protect the rights of all citizens. Ambedkar believed in the importance of a strong constitutional framework to safeguard individual liberties and promote social justice [11].

MAHATMA GANDHI-BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR DEBATE

One of the most significant debates between Gandhi and Ambedkar was the Communal Award of 1932, where Ambedkar agreed to separate electorates for SC/STs, leading Gandhi to a hunger strike in opposition [12].

Ambedkar's Ideology

Ambedkar's ideology was rooted in the pursuit of equality, social justice, and the annihilation of caste. He championed the rights of the lower castes and minorities, emphasizing constitutional measures to ensure their upliftment.

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN B.R. AMBEDKAR AND MAHATMA GANDHI

Despite their disagreements, Gandhi and Ambedkar shared some common ground [13]:

- **Symbolic Actions:** Both leaders used symbolic actions to convey their messages, such as Gandhi's burning of foreign clothing and Ambedkar's burning of Manusmriti.
- **Emphasis on Education:** They believed in the transformative power of education for individuals seeking change and reform.
- **Freedom of Religion:** Both supported freedom of religion and believed in the positive role of religion in social transformation.

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATIONALISM: GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR

Nationalism, the ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests, was a pivotal force in India's struggle for independence. Two towering figures of this era, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, shaped Indian nationalism through their distinctive approaches, ideologies, and methods. Though their ultimate goal was the liberation and betterment of India, their visions of nationalism were marked by significant differences [14].

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The comparative study of Gandhi and Ambedkar's nationalism highlights the richness and complexity of India's struggle for independence. Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence, moral integrity, and inclusive unity provided a broad-based appeal that galvanized millions. In contrast, Ambedkar's focus on social justice, legal reforms, and economic emancipation addressed the systemic inequalities

Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

that plagued Indian society. Together, their legacies contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Indian nationalism, reflecting both the moral aspirations and the pragmatic needs of a diverse and evolving nation [16].

CONCLUSION

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar contributed significantly to the process of nation-building in India, though their approaches were often in stark contrast. Gandhi's emphasis on moral persuasion and rural development clashed with Ambedkar's demand for institutionalized social reform and constitutional safeguards for marginalized communities. Despite their differences, both figures played essential roles in shaping India's democratic framework. Gandhi's legacy of non-violence and inclusivity, combined with Ambedkar's legal and social reforms, laid the foundation for a nation committed to pluralism and equality. Their contributions continue to influence contemporary debates on social justice, democracy, and national identity in India.

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Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi

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Gandhi and Ambedkar: India of Nation Building

Priyanka Choudhary & Dr. Vandana Rathi