Ambedkar and ‘Difference-sensitive’ Nationalism in India

This chapter purports to examine the nature and scope of the identitarian subalternist perspective of political nationalism which India has been able to experience ever since Ambedkar became the part of the anti-colonial struggle. Poised against the Elitist School of thought, Subaltern School was theoretically born to speak on behalf of the people on the fringe or the historically marginalized people and more importantly to contest with the oppressive class for the shared public space both in state and civil-society. It is however rightly alleged that the Subaltern School is better understood as a critique of the dominant and elitist historiography, than as an elaboration of the view-point of the subaltern masses themselves. It unerringly indicts the dominant school of unadulterated elitism by pointing out to the almost unbridgeable cleavage that existed between the dominant and dominated. Of many authors on the Indian experience of Subaltern nationalism, Aloysius is remarkable in pointing out that ‘Subaltern’ is defined in too general a term to be of any analytical significance, and the nationalism of the subalterns is unwarrantedly restricted to the search for a programmatic disjunction within the so-called elite nationalist movement itself. Aloysius further seeks to radicalize the subalternist perspective by a specific definition of ‘subaltern’ in the Indian context, and visualizing it as autonomously moving towards a nationalism of a different and superior kind – the struggle against the traditional order and its imperialist ally in the subcontinent.1

Aloysius further develops some salient aspects of subaltern weltanschauung with which subaltern political behavior is informed. He holds that excavation and reconstruction of subaltern ideology in any context is an exercise in interpretation, for the crucial area lies between scarce articulations and rich everyday forms of resistances, and the situation in India is complicated by its embeddedness in ethnic and linguistic diversities. However, affirms Aloysius, a reading of the available secondary and some primary sources does a warrant a two-stage piecing together of subaltern national ideology: the first stage consists of contestation and hence a deconstruction of cultural nationalism, from within the subaltern perspective, presented here as the political implications of cultural nationalism to the larger society; the second stage comprises the construction of an alternate political nationalism.2 To delineate the emergence of subaltern nationalism, Aloysius takes a clear position that nationalism in India has not invented a nation but on the contrary, it has prevented it. And that subaltern nationalism was the only exemplary emanation of political or mass nationalism in India and rest of the Indian nationalisms – communal and secular (more precisely Gandhian and Nehruvian) – were not only elitist in nature but also manifestly or latently different forms of cultural nationalism. It is to this subaltern nationalism of Indian subcontinent (with my own differences with Aloysius) that I have preferred to term more precisely “Difference-friendly nationalism”.

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Difference-sensitive Nationalism:

Unlike Aloysius I do not buy the idea that even before Ambedkar national consciousness had pervaded the untouchables and that they ever desired for a separate homeland probably with the only exception of Swami Achchutanand’s idea of “Achchutistan”. I would rather entitle the anti-Brahminic movements launched by the people like Sri Narayana Guru, Phule, Mangoo Ram, Periyar and many others as the movements for self-respect, community-consciousness and social equity on par with the Caste Hindus. It was only with the advent of Ambedkar on the national scenario that these local vernacular movements for social-reforms were translated into national-political movement. In order to figure out the nature of subalterity of political nationalism in India, we need to follow Ambedkar’s proposition of the genesis of untouchability in India and also of linkages between Dalit and nationalism.

It goes without saying that “Dalits” constituted the most distinguished and unique of ‘dissent groups’ in India for a variety of reasons. Amongst the various reasons, the most notable one is that unlike the many tribal nationalities and other minority groups, Dalits have had no history separate from the Brahmins to which they could refer as ‘golden period’. Much like the proletariat of Marx, their history has been the history of class exploitation and historically defeatist humiliation. With due credit to the contributions made by the predecessors of Ambedkar towards erasing the ascriptive false-consciousness, it can be safely established that these efforts to restore the national consciousness of the liminal class wherein ‘class-in-itself’ turned into ‘class-for-itself’, culminated in rather concrete form only in the charismatic statesmanship of the learned doctor – Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Defining nationality, Ambedkar notes down that “nationality is a social feeling. It is a feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. This national feeling is a double-edged feeling. It is at once a feeling of fellowship for one’s own kith and kin. It is a feeling of “Consciousness of kind” which on the one hand binds together those who have it, so strongly that it over-rides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradation and on the other, severs them from those who are not of their kind. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling.”3 Two things could be deduced from the above statement made by Ambedkar. One, social solidarity alone could be the basis of national feeling and that any ascriptive hierarchy within the ranks of society is a deceit on the way to social coherence and by this virtue anti-national in character. Secondly, that proximity to one’s own group is conditioned by the distance from the others and without maintaining this love-hate relationship no genuine-nationalism could be maintained.
Ambedkar’s Historiography:

Ambedkar took a deep interest in the historiography of India right from his student days when he thought of submitting his dissertation on “Ancient Indian Commerce”. Thereafter, he got a whole series of publication on Indian history like “The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India” and “Who Were Shudras?” and so forth. His historic-religious study entitled “the Buddha and His Dhamma” was published posthumously in 1957. To quote Ambedkar on the value-neutrality of an historian “an historian ought to be exact, sincere and impartial; free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment, or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past and the director of the future. In short, he must have an open mind, and readiness to examine all evidence even though it may be spurious.”

Ambedkar has used the empirical tool to make an inquiry into historiography of India as he himself claims that in his research he has been guided by the best tradition of the historian who treats all literature as vulgar...to be examined and tested by accepted rules of evidence without recognizing any distinction between the sacred and the profane and with the sole object of finding the truth.

He is also critical of the economic interpretation of history which the Indian Socialists and Marxists attempted. He points out that political revolutions in the history recorded have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. This has happened in Europe, America and Arabia, and also in India. The political revolutions led by Chandragupta Maurya, Shivaji, and the Sikhs were preceded by the religious and social revolutions led by the Buddha, Maharashtrian saints and Guru Nanak respectively. Ambedkar also felt that the British attitude towards Indian history was also flawed. He observes, “Historians of British India have often committed the fallacy of comparing the rule of the British with their immediate or remote predecessors...they ought to compare the rulers of India with the contemporaries in England.”

In order to establish the logical linkages between Ambedkar’s nationalism of ‘difference-sensibility’ and the highly debated socially-sensitive categories like minority, gender and caste, it becomes inevitable to juxtapose theoretically, the very ideology of nationalism as experienced in colonial and post-colonial India, with the above-mentioned categories and thereafter evaluate this juxtaposition in the light of Ambedkar’s notion of nationalism and its theoretical engagement with such categories.

Nationalism Vis-à-vis Minority and Gender:

Having dealt with all the forms of ideological self-representation of nationalism in India as well as the aspects of illegitimate nationalism of Tagore and Gandhi, it becomes inevitable not to gloss over the contemporary debate of trans-nationalism or counter-nationalism. These sets of thinkers reject the very ideology of nationalism regarding it as
broadly based on the Enlightenment project of modernity which they believe as unsuitable for illiberal Afro-Asian societies based primarily on identity groups and identity politics. Juxtaposing nationalism with minority and gender, they believe that nationalism by nature is a monistic doctrine quite prone to practice official version of singularist nationalism and hence does not fit into a plural society. Akhtar Majeed argues that when the identity of an ethnic group, or a minority, is not recognized it becomes more assertive and tries to transform into an entity different from national identity. When such groups become conscious of their identity and ask for equality, the artificial edifice of the nation may feel threatened. He further argues that minorities are generally touchy about symbols of their ethnic-cultural identity and they hold on rigidly to all their distinctive possessions in an attempt to preserve their identity, particularly if the demand to change such identity comes from outside the group. The very concept of a ‘national culture’ is often questioned, particularly by the minorities in a plural society, in view of traditional divisions between high and low cultures. Can the ‘culture of the majority’ be termed as the national culture or the latter has to include variants and colors of all the streams in the nation? Majeed adds further that culture can become a vital element for citizenship, in nation-building, a confluence between people and nation, but a culture based on the invented traditions and on the theory of irredentism cannot perform this function because it can only create divisions in the process of nation-building.6

In the same fervor, Aditya Nigam in his article ‘National Minorities’ argues that the emergence of the question of national minorities has highlighted the extremely problematic relationship that all nationalisms have with minority cultures. Yet, there was a time, for instance, when we all lived with the happy dream that nationhood is the last station on the road to final emancipation embodied in the ideal of a universal abstract citizenship – unmarked by any identity but that of ‘man’. ‘Man’ subsumed the woman as he subsumed all possible cultural identities – other than national identity.7 Nigam cites Partha Chatterjee to show how the nationalist discourse in its exploitative venture in the colonial era appropriates the women’s question as well as caste question into its inner domain and refuses to make it “an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state”8 Nigam concludes his argument saying that one is not so sure that we can think of a nationalism that does not carry the seeds of xenophobia within it and in purely empirical terms we have yet to see such nationalisms. And this is all the more likely to be the case when we talk of anticolonial nationalisms, for it is here that the awareness of belonging to a subject people can take the most virulently xenophobic forms. It is more fruitful that rather than seek to humanize and transform nationalism, we strive towards a different kind of society where citizenship is not predicated upon ‘belonging’ in some kind of primordial cultural sense but upon a lived relationship to a place and people. Clearly, argues Nigam, such a notion of citizenship needs to be worked out in practice and will have to go through an endless process of innumerable trial and error. It is also clear that nationalist and state elites are not to going to be convinced easily about such proposals. What we need then, asserts Nigam, is to subject our nationalist assumptions to continuous and rigorous critique. As to the location of critique, Nigam suggests unhesitant that one way is to mount a critique of ‘discrimination against minorities’ from the vantage point of a secular credo that occupies a kind of archimedean ‘nowhere’ – a ‘state-like position’ from where it can speak with the equal distance from all communities. Such a critique is
not directed at nationalism as it is against what it calls communal politics – that is, politics that is aggressively built around community identities.9

Nigam also invokes Edward Said proposing, against such an understanding, a notion of secular criticism that is based on identification with minority cultures. In Saidian terms, Bruce Robbins suggests, the term secular stands in opposition to national rather than religious identifications and belief systems (as cited in Aditya Nigam, ‘National Minorities’, 2002). He sees the condition of national minorities as symptomatic of a general xenophobia that is an always-present possibility within the structure of nationalism. Said therefore, invites us to see the state of homelessness and exile as an abiding condition of modern existence, or as Mufti puts it, sees this state as the paradigmatic trope for minority existence in modern times (Ibid.). Finally, Aditya ends up with the argument that repression and assimilation of ‘minority cultures’ goes hand in hand with the project of nationalism. In fact, the very production of the national majority, through such assimilations, creates the minority culture as its other.

Liberal theorists have been alleged generally of ignoring issues regarding minority rights as group rights, their legitimate share and adequate space in the structures of power and privileges particularly due to their strong commitment to the autonomy of the individual. They have placed the autonomy factor as the bedrock of western liberal democracy which is regarded as the decisive factor for the notion of equality and stability of electoral democracy. But in the recent years, maintains Arshi Khan, the liberal contractualists have faced some challenges from their liberal fraternity who have argued strongly for the rights of the deprived people, national minorities, ethnic groups, and women. But all such liberal discourse, adds Khan, based on emerging realities in western societies and the new social movements, have finally pledged to conform to the autonomy factor which undermines the limit of reasonableness of the demand of minority rights or group rights particularly in non-western societies. Arshi Khan blames the liberals to have failed to evolve since renaissance in not shifting significantly in their emphasis on individuality as the yardstick for justice, as group rights were always suspected by them of being antithesis to the freedom and choice of the individuals. He held that the liberals came up with the package of multiculturalism to look at the issue of the recognition of differences including the rights of minorities not as group rights but as the rights of persons belonging to minorities.10

However, the claims for minority rights (for justice and equality) gained importance with emerging faults and challenges in western societies and finally with the collapse of authoritarian establishments in central-eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Federal liberal democracies like Canada, Australia, United States, Switzerland and Germany successfully worked out to share powers with linguistic groups. ‘Anglo-conformity’ and ‘melting-pot’ models were given up. The US, Canada and Australia rejected the assimilationist projects and adopted towards immigrants, settlers and indigenous populations who want to maintain various aspects of their ethnic heritage.

In this debate, Arshi Khan argues, Liberals tend to delineate a dichotomous relationship between the ‘internal restriction’ (on an individual) and ‘external protection’ (by the
state) in order only to make the ethnic group rights subservient to the majoritarian state. He cites Surinder S. Jodhka, “Communities prioritized norms and values of the collectivity over the individual” (S.S. Jodhka, Community and Identities, 2001, 18). Amidst others, Kymlicka has strongly argued for the rights of minorities saying that minority rights cannot be subsumed under the category of human rights but with certain fundamental conditions. In particular, he stressed on two important points or constraints: “minority rights should not allow one group to dominate other groups; and they should not enable a group to oppress its own members. In other words, liberals should seek to ensure that there is equality between groups, and freedom and equality within groups. Within these limits, minority rights can play a valuable role within a broader theory of liberal justice.”

Liberals of different varieties have maintained, to the utter dislike of Majeed Khan, the factor of the absence of ‘internal restrictions’ within the minority or group which can be recommended for ‘external protections’. Although Kymlicka has been criticized by a host of minority rights theorists for what they have called ‘individualist reductionism’.

Another noted theorist, Bill Bowring claims that groups do have an existence separate from the individuals who compose them. Bill quotes Rom Harre, who pointed out that structured groups, that is collectivities, are ontologically prior to individuals. It means that groups have real existence; things can be said about them which can not be said of the individuals which compose them; they have causal powers which are greater and different from the wills of individuals. Roy Bhaskar’s theory of critical realism indicated that “Society pre-exists the individual”. Isaiah Berlin emphasized group rights as the third form of liberty. He criticized the liberal tradition, especially Mill, for not understanding the desire for group recognition. He was convinced that unless this form of liberty is recognized it would be impossible to understand why individuals belonging to certain groups accept the curtailment of their individual liberties but still feel enjoyment of group liberty.

Otto Gierke argued that modernity is built upon the obliteration of the idea of group rights, which was the hallmark of the medieval configuration of power between eleventh and fifteenth centuries in Europe. He regarded the idea of political association, recognizing only the sovereign individual and sovereign state, as a flawed conception of political life. He argued that the modern idea of unity was a mythical entity and that political life embodied an irreducible multiplicity, which was expressed through group identity and membership. He also refuted the idea that the individual existed before or independent of group to which he or she belonged. Instead, he argued that group identities were as real as individual identities and they were socially and morally constructed through the inter-subjective process of mutual recognition. He insisted that the way people are connected makes a difference to the kind of group to which they belong. Roughly speaking this whole school of minority and group rights seeks to distinguish between Membership-blind model of justice and Membership-sensitive model of justice with the greater insistence on the adoption of the latter. They also bring attention towards the large unrepresentational site of liberal democracy along with the politico-legal recognition of preferential treatment with special rights of ethnic minorities by the state.
With view to this Young calls for ‘deliberative democracy’ in order to secure representational guarantees on the reason that existing electoral and legislative processes are ‘unrepresentative’ in the sense that they fail to reflect the diversity of the population in terms of presence. She appeals to two ideals of social justice (fundamentally required for democracy) – self-development and self-determination. These two general values correspond to two general conditions of injustice – (1) oppression, institutional constraint on self-development, and (2) domination, institutional constraint on self-determination. She interprets the value of self-development along lines similar to the value Amartya Sen calls for equality as capabilities. Just social institutions provide social conditions for all persons to learn and use satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, and enable them to play and communicate with others... in contexts where others can listen. Self-determination consists in being able to participate in determining one’s action and the condition of one’s action; its contrary is domination. Applying this theory to Indian case, Akhtar Majeed concludes that provisions for cultural and religious rights of minorities, particularly for the members of the Muslim minority in India, have appeared to be ineffective due to their marginalization in power structures at various levels. Any minority, Akhtar believes, particularly in the country of communities having strong consciousness of religion at the inter-community level, would face great difficulties in sustaining these rights together with deliberate or unintended process of exclusion. What is really required, he suggests, is to insure inclusion both at the levels of political representation and governmental agencies. Finally, rights for minorities are necessarily required for ensuring equality and justice in a country where both the majority and minorities are supposed to be the prisoners of consciousness rooted in history (Majeed Khan, Minority Rights and Liberal Neutrality, op. cit., 53).

Ayesha Jalal argues that discomfort with difference is a function of the inclusionary nationalism and, its concomitant, equal citizenship which are among the defining features of modern nation-states. But despite ample evidence on the ground, the paradox of inclusionary nationalism ending up as a narrative construction of an exclusionary majoritarian identity has rarely commanded attention from the votaries of the nation-state. In India matters are further complicated, continues Jalal, by the fact that the inclusionary idiom is expressed in an artificial binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism. To be secular and nationalist for a Muslim entails publicly disclaiming too close an association with the specific traits of the minority community, religious and cultural. Otherwise there is no escaping the pejorative level of ‘communalism’. But the protagonists of Hindutva, says Jalal, can get away critiquing the state’s pseudo-secularism while pitching their bid for the nationalist mantle. Thus she concludes that the problem of difference in South Asia as a whole and of Muslim identity in particular cannot begin to be addressed without forsaking the dichotomies between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ as well as ‘nationalism’ and ‘communalism’. Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose together in their article ‘Nationalism, Democracy and Development’ note that instead of acknowledging the flaws in the idioms of inclusionary nationalism, state managers have responded to exclusionary challenges by reinforcing the ideational and structural pillars of the nation-state. The disjunction between official policies and societal demands and expectations has never been more critical. Instead of molding the inherited state apparatus to better reflect the emotions that
had fired the nationalist movements, the imperatives of strategically placed elites in the late colonial era allowed the state to highjack the very idea of the ‘nation’ and become the sole repository of legitimate nationalism.18

Similarly ‘nation’ has also been juxtaposed with gender and in particular with women as another group which, in spite of constituting half of the population, has been on the fringe and remarkably a historic victim of poor representation which made Virginia Woolf declare – “As a woman, I have no country” (Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas, 1938, 168). Wendy Robbins notes that women and girls are the majority of world’s people; yet, of the world’s more than 180 countries today, only 14 are headed by women. Women’s representation in Parliaments and courts of justice around the world does not remotely match their strength of numbers in the population. Of the 14 of the 53 countries of the commonwealth that recognize Elizabeth II as their queen and head of state, only four have a woman as her representative, i.e., as Governor General.19 Paradoxically, creation myths and archaeological evidence from different parts of the world suggest that the primal force of existence was a female deity and that ancient societies were likely to have been matriarchal. “She (woman) is there at the beginning of the lives of individuals and of nations”, states Elleke Boehmer in “Stories of Women and Mothers”, the splendid lead article in Motherlands (She also asks a rhetorical question pregnant with implications for women authors in Africa, Canada and everywhere: “Do nationalist vocabularies not implicate women in certain paradoxes of identity and affiliation?” Elleke, ‘Stories of Women and Mothers’, 4).

Robbins further suggests that Benedict Anderson, in his celebrated though myopically male-centered Imagined Communities, points out that nationalism describes its object using either the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, patria) or of home in order to denote something to which one is ‘naturally’ tied. Women are often depicted, and depict themselves, as reproducers of the nation. Mother India, Mother Africa, Mother Ireland, and so on, are all part of a popular imaginary.20 Some feminist analysts have explained the exclusion of women from the discourse on nation as following, paradoxically, from this very connection to home, i.e., the confinement of women to the private sphere and their exclusion from the public political sphere (See Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract, 1988). Home is a highly gendered structure. Anne McClintock’s Imperial Leather explores the hierarchy implicit in the concept of home, whether writ large or small. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial – the “national family”, the global “family of nations”, the colony as a “family of black children ruled over by a white father” – depends on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere.21

Elleke Boehmer postulates that the “motherland” of male nationalism may “not signify ‘home’ and ‘source’ to women”. She observes that the male role in nationalist scenarios is typically metonymic; that is, men are contiguous with each other and with the national whole. Women, by contrast, appear “in a metaphoric or symbolic role” (Boehmer, op. cit., 6). They have not infrequently been constructed as the symbolic bearers of a collectivity’s identity and honor, (Yuval-Davis, Gender and Nation, 45) and female figures often boldly signify ‘homeland’ and ‘home’. Canadian critic Dina Georgis, in her
article “Mother Nations and the Persistence of ‘Not Here’”, parses this with respect not only to imperialism, a discourse in which the disempowered colony is constructed as passive and unruly, but also with respect to nationalism and nation states (Yuval-Davis, Ibid, 45). Published in the Canadian Women’s studies’ special issue (2000) on National Identity and Gender Politics, Georgis’ article begins: “Established in feminist postcolonial studies is that embedded in the formation of the nation, especially colonized nations, is a maternal and feminine trope”. It continues: “As a symbol ...the female body has not only been deployed to sustain nationalist regimes within nation states” (Georgis, op. cit., 27).

Thus, not only is imperial Britain, adds Wendy Robbins, represented as female (‘Britannia’) but so also are the revolting American colonies, symbolized by the female iconography of the Statue of Liberty; not only are the loyal French colonists deported from Acadie symbolized by Longfellow’s ‘Evangeline’ but so, too, is the mother country of France, at least in its revolutionary incarnation as ‘Marianne’. In the nineteenth century, political cartoonists also featured the new dominion as female: ‘Miss Canada’, daughter of ‘Britannia’, typically courted by, but independent enough to resist, her annexationist ‘Cousin Jonathan’ – the USA. The simultaneous symbolic celebration and political repression of women is not uncommon. Even the legal equality granted to women under the constitutions of modern states is more often than not circumscribed by family legislation – privileging men in the areas of marriage, divorce, child custody, maintenance, and inheritance rights (Robbins cites Deniz Kandiyoti, op. cit., 171.). Such examples provide evidence for feminist theorists that “women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency”.22

Emphasizing that women’s participation in nationalist movements is much more than just symbolic, Lina Sunseri notes in her article ‘Moving Beyond the Feminism versus Nationalism Debate’: “Historically, women’s participation in anti-colonial liberation movements has been vital; but [it] has not translated into enduring gains for women in the new nation”23 Sunseri also quotes Cynthia Enloe’s observation: “[A]fter national liberation, women generally have been pushed to domestic roles”. National liberationist movements have a very instrumental agenda; typically they “mobilize women when they are needed in the labor force or even at the front, only to return them to domesticity or to subordinate roles in the public sphere when the national emergency is over”24 Robbins quotes Elleke Boehmer, “Despite professed ideals, nationalisms do not address all individuals equally: significant distinctions and discriminations are made along gendered (and also class and racial) lines...” To this list of distinctions and discriminations, she adds religion, language and sexual orientation (Ibid. 180). Before ending up this debate on gender-nation dichotomy, Arun Prabha Mukherjee needs to be mentioned regarding her questioning Anderson’s position; she asks: “If nations are experienced as ‘imagined communities’ and evoke discourses of kinship and home, why does the narrator in Dionne Brand’s short story, “At the Lisbon Plate”, describe herself as ‘[a] woman in enemy territory’?”25 Elsewhere, in Chronicles of the Hostile Sun, Brand uses the trope of homelessness to describe her relationship with Canada:
I am not a refugee,
I have my papers,
I was born in the Caribbean,
practically in the sea,
fifteen degrees above the equator,
I have a Canadian passport,
I have lived here all my adult life,
I am stateless anyway.

A Line of Moderation:

As far as the journey of Afro-Asian anti-colonial nationalism is concerned, it goes without saying that the liberating potential of this nationalism in illiberal society gets diluted in the post-colonial nation-building phase and challenges to its legitimate continuity begin to surface chiefly from ethnic minority groups as well as from women or the vulnerable gendered structures. The homogenizing endeavors of singularist modernizing nationalism has been contested and resisted in the plural group-differentiated societies by two groups of intellectuals. One group was keen on substituting society and individual autonomy for the special group rights of pre-modern ethnic communities as well as substituting the very monistic unity of nationalism for the horizontal difference-ridden plurality of ethnic communities. This group I would prefer to call as the ‘communitarian radicals’. Another group seeks sufficient guarantee from the state against the communal majority and proper accommodation of difference-led ethnic identities by the nation-state. This group, which I would prefer to call as the ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalists, not only distances itself from the former group but also pursues a line of moderation between communitarianism and singularist homogenizing nationalism.

In the colonial era, Ambedkar could validly be said to have belonged to this line of nationalist discourse which was followed later, at the discourse level, in the post-colonial age, by academicians like Aijaz Ahmad and Amartya Sen. As regards the Communitarian Radicals, their perpetual contestation against the relentless forces of singularist official nationalism has unquestionably contributed to the efforts to civilize and humanize the tyrannical statist versions of nation in the domestic realm, it has failed to form a potent antithetical discourse against the nationalist discourse which is capable not only of accommodating majoritarianism but also, and quite skillfully, of grand ideologies like liberalism and socialism.

It is against this dichotomy of nation-community and nation-gender, that certain intermediating and moderating intellectuals like Aijaz Ahmad have come up to lead the debate towards a more viable direction. Elaborating upon the second phase of nationalism in illiberal society, Aijaz in his celebrated piece ‘Nationalism and Peculiarities of the Indian’ notes that sometime between the early 1970s and the mid-80s, nationalism and the idea of the ‘nation’ itself started falling into terrible disrepute, and the very premises of the nationalisms that now became dominant were very different. Aijaz notices this shift largely also in Middle East as elsewhere, for instance, the decline of Nasserism in
Egypt and the resurgence of militant Islamicist groupings like Jama’aat-e-Islamiya and so on. These retained the nationalist content of the Nasserist project but re-formulated it in neo-traditional and Islamicist terms so that anti-imperialism gradually became anti-Westernism, antimodernism and revivalist religio-cultural nationalism. A similar process was then afoot in Iran, Afghanistan and Algeria. Aijaj cites an essay entitled “Postmodern Obscurantism and the Muslim Question”, by Aziz al-Azmeh where he traces the repertoire of contemporary Islamicist discourses not so much to medieval orthodoxy as to the lineages of nineteenth century European irrationalism and right-wing romanticism – particularly the German and French variants. 27

Showing his familiarity with criticisms of the class character of bourgeois nationalism from the Left, Aijaj also sees some vindications in the politically necessary criticism of nationalism from the anti-caste heritage and the women’s movement which charged (by and large correctly) that nationalism – not nationalism in the abstract, but the actually existing nationalism that we have inherited – tended not only to mobilize women and the oppressed castes for anticolonial agitations but also to restrain movements for their own emancipation, in the name of a fictive national unity which in practice tended to guarantee the hegemony of upper-class and upper-caste men. To the extent that revolt against colonial rule went together with defense of hierarchies within the nation, nationalism was here seen as a contradictory phenomenon – progressive and reactionary at one and the same time. 28

Aijaz notes that as one was only beginning to grapple with these insurgent interrogations of nationalism from within the anti-colonial nationalist heritage, one was also pressed by postmodernism and the rise of a very different kind of identity politics, first in the metropolitan countries and then in one’s own national environment. In these very different discourses, the integrative, secular project of nationhood was seen as repressive in that it denied the primacy of the more primordial identities of religion, tribe and ethnicity that now came to be valued a great deal as true markers of one’s identity. It was deemed repressive also in that the nationalism that fought against colonialism tended to favor a strong state to modernize economy and society. Hence, Aijaz argues, a rampant anti-statist was combined with misty idealizations of pre-modern identities. The anti-colonial, modernizing nationalism therefore earned postmodernist rebuke not for failing to accomplish what it promised but for attempting it at all in the first place, since anti-statism, anti-modernity and anti-progressivism, believes Aijaz Ahmad, were cherished tenets in the kind of postmodernism that was universalized under pressure from American universities which kept shipping out into the world re-Americanized versions of certain trends in French postmodernism – represented by such figures as Touraine, Lyotard, and Kristeva (in her later writings), who were themselves indebted to the work of an earlier generation of American liberal sociologists. Aijaz argues with a critical tenor that influential sections of Indian social science have of course developed their own derivative discourses, in which the premodern is punctually staged as the postmodern solution to the problems of modernity. Nation was now to be rejected, says Aijaz, in the name of a free play of primordial identities, and the nation-state in the name of a kind of a libertarianism which leave only the market to organize freedoms, satisfactions and social relations. 29
Aijaz also notes that the same nationalism could be progressive in one instance and retrogressive in another – progressive in its anticolonial struggle and retrogressive in its position on caste and gender or modernity. He realizes that it is often the ambiguity – even a certain schizophrenia – of a great nationalism that accounts for its social reach, precisely because its inner contradictions tend to reflect and then get woven into the antinomies of society at large. Aijaz’s hypothesis on nationalism is that there really is no such a thing as nationalism per se, with an identifiable, trans-historical essence, over and above particular historical practices and projects. Nationalism appears to him as much less a determinate theory of a determinate object and more a war zone – a contested, conflictual terrain on which rival power-blocks compete for hegemony. These are processes of formation, political and historical projects of becoming, falling apart, getting reconstituted. Aijaz notes with a Marxian tenor that nationalism can be the ideology of resistance to colonial rule and imperialist domination, but that same nationalism (or a close cousin of it) can also be the ideology of a fictive unity in which the exploiter and the exploited, irreconcilable in practice, can be made to appear as equal members of a society or a polity. Aijaz here confesses his theoretical proximity to Anderson’s, in particular, where Anderson opines that the nationalist discourse imagines the nation to be a “community of horizontal comradeship” even though, in reality, members of a nation tend to be highly unequal, and anything but comradely, when it comes to distributions of property, power and privilege.

While ruling out the historical-cultural invocation of past by the ‘cultural differentialism’ (Aijaz’s term for ‘cultural nationalism’), Aijaz claims that in emphasizing the modernity of Indian nationhood, he does not wish to join that strand of postcolonial theory which simply debunks what it contemptuously calls ‘the long past’ and ‘the deep nation’. In our situation, Aijaz emphasizes, we encounter ‘the long past’, from its worst to its best aspects, woven intricately and almost seamlessly into the present-day social fabric, and the modern nation that arises out of this social fabric is simply not free to shrug it off. At this point Aijaz takes his firm position that in his view, the postcolonial theory which debunks ‘the deep nation’ and the primordialist right-wing which keeps invoking ‘the deep nation’ are two faces of the same coin – here, as in so many other places, we witness a peculiar mutual dependence between postmodernism and premodernism. The mistake in categorization here, Aijaz notes, is the collapsing of ‘nation’ with ‘civilization’: one side, in its devotion to the premodern, celebrates the “depth”; the other, in its devotion to the infinite novelty of the postmodern, merely debunks that “depth”.

Aijaz takes a more viable intermediate position between the two extremes arguing that nations are not conjured up out of emptiness; neither empty time nor empty space. They arise, as outcomes of particular kinds of political projects, within a particular continuum, and that continuum, which is not nation itself, is what we can call ‘the long past’. That depth, adds Aijaz, – call it civilization – does not just go away because a new way of organizing political society has arisen. The novelty of the modern is an event in itself; it is not necessarily a negation of what has preceded it. Nor can that novelty ever be sui generis. He, therefore, suggests that one must always make a sharp distinction between primordialism as an ideology and a politics on the one hand and the recognition of actual civilizational depth on the other.
Aijaz Ahmad, in his curiosity to understand as to why it was only India amongst the newly decolonized countries of Asia and Africa which immediately became a democratic republic, a multi-lingual polity and a secular nation, goes further into civilizational depth of India to dig up the answer. Ruling out that it was an achievement of the leaders of our national movement alone, Aijaz holds that it was rather the in-built perennial tradition of resistance from the below – so deeply rooted into the drift of Indian civilization – against all forms of historical hegemonies, for instance the tradition of Buddhism and later Bhakti movement and Sikhism against the hegemonic Brahminism and the Sanskrit classicism, that kept the caste question or the question of oppression irrepressible and alive if not resolved, throughout the civilizational march. This was the sole reason, Aijaz believes, for the historic failure of Brahminism to ever become wholly hegemonic, in all the pores of society, and transform itself successfully into a Universal Church on the model of Catholic Christendom. The kind of hegemony Brahminism did achieve of course proved catastrophic, Aijaz cites the historian Suvira Jaiswal, who argues that the core of Brahminical hegemony is not doctrinal orthodoxy but a rigid social orthopraxy. This was the historic compromise Brahminism seems to have forged: learning to live with a great multiplicity of doctrines, so long as the dharma of varnashram – in modern parlance, the caste system – was observed and socially enforced. The weakness ensuing from this compromise was that it could not transform itself into a Universal Church which would be the precondition for a real identification between Church and State; the strength ensuing from the compromise was that the power of Brahminism was now located not in the Church-State but in society itself, in the superior power and property of the dominant castes who would enforce the caste-based division of labor in daily life for the sake of their own dominance.  

So the point that Aijaz Ahmad conclusively makes is that anticolonial movement in its ensemble – which includes not only the political coexistence of Bourgeois nationalism of Congress, Hindu nationalism of R.S.S. and others, and the nationalism of the Left-Wing but is also inclusive of radical anti-Brahminical social reforms led by people like Phule and Periyar and the politico-national representation of such reforms in Ambedkar – is a unique and more nuanced reflection of historic Indian civilization which needs to be preserved and consolidated rather than surrendered to either of the extremist (cultural nationalism or postmodernity) delirium. Finally, Aijaz Ahmad ends up with the remark (on religio-linguistic pluralism and regional diversity) that he cannot think of any country in the world where the idea of the common nationhood is so firmly entrenched and yet the longing for a national language, unlike the Euro-American monoglot nations, is so weak. We seem, he adds, to have settled down to the idea of the multiplicity of languages more comfortably than has any other multi-lingual polity. What was even more remarkable – considering that ethnicity and language has been so central in the history of the great majority of nationalisms, especially in Europe – is that India has displayed an astonishing lack of ethno-linguistic nationalisms. At no point in the course of the anticolonial nationalism did there develop in India a powerful linguistically-based separatist movement, on the model, say, of the communally-based separatist movement that led to the creation of Pakistan. Instead, India witnessed a large number of movements for the creation of linguistically-based states within the Union. To Aijaz, multiplicity of
languages and hence cultural diversity is something which Indians take for granted without even questioning it.

Similarly, Amartya Sen, in his article ‘On Interpreting India’s Past’, endeavors to interpret Indian past in order not only to distinguish nation from state but also to give some legitimacy to the concept of nation. He holds that the concept of a nation reflects a sense of political identity that is not split up into belonging to distinct communities, and can in principle admit anyone, irrespective of communal background, by virtue of a shared sense of political identity. In order to show the non-statist conception of nation, Amartya Sen cites an informal line of reasoning by Arthur Miller – ‘a good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself’. He also shows his disharmony with the communitarian line of emphasis on the immediacy, relevance, and richness of belonging to a particular ‘fragment’, rather than to the, what they call, more remote collectivity of a nation. One criticism that Amartya Sen offers against this school is that it would be no less a mistake to assume that violence and injustice cannot have its origin in the community itself. Besides he also adds that the classical nationalist approaches developed in pre-independence India have to be understood and judged in terms of the tasks that were then faced and then have to be reassessed in the light of the problems faced contemporarily. He argues that despite many lapses, which can be readily identified, there was epistemic merit as well as practical value in the classical nationalist approaches to ‘Indianness’, and furthermore, there are merits in some of these visions even in the context of the current challenges faced in post-independent India (particularly arising from divisiveness, sectarianism, inequality and communal tension). The denials of these merits, Amartya Sen Concludes, are based, in many cases, on a factual neglect of the richness of India’s history, and sometimes on conceptual confounding (for example between the concepts of a ‘nation’ and a ‘nation-state’, which are related but non-congruent).

Juxtaposing Ambedkar’s nationalism with Communitarians:

After having discussed all the variants of Indian nationalism and its general discomfort with minorities and women as projected by the communitarian radicals and feminists, it becomes inexorable to locate Ambedkar in this discourse. My hypothesis is that Ambedkar’s nationalism (Difference-sensitive nationalism) plays a bridge (a line of moderation) between the two mutually exclusive spheres of inclusionary official nationalism and radical communitarianism/feminism. Ambedkar does not collapse individual autonomy with community’s autonomy or for that matter, community’s autonomy with nation’s autonomy. In his larger picture of nationalism, each of these normative cum empirical categories (individual, community, and nation) gets their appropriate space without aspiring to knock each other out. Ambedkar’s idea of ‘difference’, unlike the communitarians and radical feminists, does not stand at odds with ‘nation’ and on the contrary, it gets comfortably accommodated into his framework of nationalism. In his idea of nationalism, majoritarian community does not subsume minorities (as Ambedkar not only provides with constitutional safeguards to minority groups but also emphasizes upon creating an inter-communicative space for all, the
communities by changing the communal mindset itself), man does not subsume woman and majoritarian culture does not become national culture. He would not agree with someone like Aditya Nigam in saying that every nationalism carries the seeds of xenophobia within it or in saying that all variants of anti-colonial nationalism carried some or other xenophobic forms within it (Aditya Nigam, ‘National Minorities’, op.cit, 2002). Similarly, on the question of women and nation, Ambedkar, in the first instance, seems to come closer (when he holds that “Gandhiji! I have no homeland” [See Gail Omvedt, 2004]) to the feminist like Virginia Woolf when she holds (“As a woman, I have no country”). But in the last instance, Ambedkar would insist to problematize the women’s question within the framework of nationalism rather than without it. In brief, nationalism, to Ambedkar, is not an evil idea but a creative imagination (similar to Anderson’s claim). In this light, the purpose of this chapter is to examine in detail all the components (both at the level of Nationalist Thought and Nationalist Politics) of Ambedkar’s “Difference-sensitive nationalism” and also the way it self-presented itself into a different discourse from its competing nationalisms.

A Difference-sensitive Social-cohesiveness:

Ambedkar’s notion of nationalism is socially-inclusive in nature and rests itself fully on social cohesiveness (although not premised on difference-blindness) which would not tend to exclude any social group inhabiting Indian subcontinent. Ambedkar, undoubtedly, gives primacy to both society and social philosophy or revolution over politics and political philosophy or revolution. This refers to his attempt to reinterpret Indian history in such manner as to show that social revolution has always preceded political revolution, for instance, the social revolution initiated by Buddha, Guru Nanak, and Maharashtrian saints certainly preceded the political revolution by Asoka, Sikh empire and Shivaji respectively. This is probably why he asserts that his philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. His social philosophy (as it begins with man’s social context) is enshrined, to his own claim, in three words – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; and they have strictly nothing to derive from French Revolution, on the contrary they derive essentially from the teachings of Buddha. Ambedkar’s belief in social-cohesion was closely related to his belief in social change and he had little doubt that both can go together without making any split in the social unity and this is why he introduces the means of non-violent persuasion so as to retain the social cohesion which preconditions the healthy state.

Ambedkar’s concern of social cohesion does not refer to the people as an undifferentiated mass but his social-cohesiveness takes into account the different markers of identity of a social group but he remains vigilant to the fact lest these identity-markers should outlaw the very idea of nation. This also gets manifested in his writings and activities, for instance, he put forward a ‘peaceful campaign’ to secure civil rights in pre-independence days. Another instance is where he opined that social reformers should create public opinion in condemnation of existing “gross inequalities” and they should establish “bureaus” to deal with urgent cases of inequality. The ‘bureaus’ might seek to persuade the powerful section of society to give a chance to the poor, the depressed classes, to
serve in their shops, factories and mills. Much can be done, the learned doctor adds, by private firms and companies managed by the caste Hindus through extending their patronage to the depressed classes and employing them in their offices in various grades and occupations suited to the capacities of the applicants.

Another instance, wherein Ambedkar's notion of socially-inclusive nationalism becomes apparent, can be cited in his suggestion that a 'common participation' be organized at the family level among the different classes of the people, particularly between the caste Hindus and untouchables. This involves the establishment of a closer contact between the duo. Only a 'common cycle of participation', he emphasized, can help people overcome the reciprocal estrangement amidst them. Nothing, to Ambedkar, can do this more effectively than the admission of the depressed classes to the houses of the caste-Hindus as guests and servants. To quote him, "The live contact thus established will familiarize both to a common and associated life and will pave the way for that unity, which we are all striving after."

**Social-transformation: A Masterkey to Nation-Building**

It becomes easy now to make a note of Ambedkar's concern for an organic unity in society, which is central for a viable nation building. It is only by exploring further in the same direction that we would get a more lucid picture of Ambedkar's grave concern for social transformation and its significant role in building a healthy organic nation. The idea of "organic nation" should not be confused here with Gellner's idea of 'homogenizing the nation from above by the political elite creating a high culture'. Ambedkar’s idea of organicity (organic nation) evolves from the below (masses) and eventually it reflects in national politics. Social reformers and enlightened intellectuals might play a crucial rule in this transition phase. Ambedkar argues that a democratic way of life cannot be conceived of without an ideal society. "An ideal society", he informs us, "should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. In other words there must be social endosmosis." Ambedkar seeks here to provide the traditional stagnated society with what Gellner calls 'social entropy'.

Democracy is not, to him, merely a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen. Ambedkar never believed that certain political rights alone could constitute the basis of democracy. It has to be based on love, friendship and dignity. He continues, "The Touchable and Untouchables cannot be held together by law – certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorates for separate electorates. The only thing that can hold them together is love." This clearly shows that Ambedkar wanted social-change through 'peace' and 'persuasion' and not by 'force' and 'compulsion'. He did not at any point of time
subscribe to the view that ‘social-harmony’ could be achieved through any violent means. Ambedkar maintains that political institutions must take account of social forces with a view to reforming or to refining the existing social institutions. He agrees with Ferdinand Lassalle, the friend and co-worker of Karl-Marx, and quotes him, “The actual constitution of a country has its existence only in the actual condition of the force, which exists in the country: hence political constitutions have value and permanence only when they accurately express those conditions of forces which exist in practice within a society.” This social force, at times, manifests itself through the legislature and is reflected in legislative changes. It is the only effective way to change the perverse social institutions prevailing in the existing society where the method of ‘peace’ and ‘persuasion’ fails. Such a legislative change, for instance, was proposed by Ambedkar with the introduction of the “Hindu Code Bill” through an act of Legislature, in 1950. Though the attempt ended in failure, because of vehement opposition, yet later on, some of its items like ‘Women Inheritance Act’, ‘the Dowry Act’, etc. have been passed by the Parliament. Undoubtedly, the main aim of the Hindu Code Bill was to reform and bring about radical and fundamental changes in Hindu Society through legislative means.

The faith in the unity of the nation leads Ambedkar to support the cause of a socialistic society, which will however retain the freedom of the individual. His concept of state-socialism is not of the doctrinaire kind; instead it is the blend of profound moral idealism and social realism. He seeks to synthesize what he considers to be the sound elements in both socialism and individualism, and he includes them in his comprehensive concept of the common good. The concept of the common good is derived from the supreme values of the individual and the social life. For the common good does not differ in kind from both the individual and the social good. It is in substance, only the sum total of the good of all individuals in society. Ambedkar suggests that the common good should include ‘common models’ and ‘common standards’ and the harmonious modus operandi of the people, in the absence of which society cannot be a harmonious whole.

Moving to the political sphere, Ambedkar suggested in common with the most leaders of Indian thought, that the spread of ‘mass-education’ and the establishment of a ‘two Party system’ are essentially good for the healthy functioning of democracy as well as legislature. A Legislature is sounder, if it is a body of the best candidates, elected by an intelligent and well-informed electorate; and that body is sounder if it is governed by ‘two-parties’. Ambedkar was of the opinion that three or more parties made the issues confusing, and a single Party constituted no democracy at all. This can best be secured through an act of legislation for the refinement of political institutions in Indian society, where communal parties have grown in numerous ways and in fact they are causing harm to the emotional integration and national unity.

Thus there can be little doubt that Ambedkar stood and struggled for not only social cohesiveness but also social transformation through the effective channels of peace, persuasion and above all through state-machinery. To quote Bhima Sen Hantal, “He (Ambedkar) was not satisfied merely with the upliftment of the so-called Untouchables to which he belonged, he wanted the total restructuring of the Indian society, thereby establishing the true democratic nation based on equality, liberty and fraternity.”

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sen also calls him a true nationalist and a freedom fighter for a number of reasons. To cite one of them would be his thesis entitled “Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India” which had to face several jolts as he projected the true picture of the British’s exploitation of Indian Economy.

**Communalism: A Threat to the ‘Difference-sensitive’ Nationalism**

Ambedkar’s notion of ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism remains far from completion without laying the strong foundation of secularism which not only interfaces with the religio-communal divide of Hindu and Muslim but also the racial Aryan-Dravidian divide. In his noted work “Pakistan or Partition of India”, Ambedkar gives sufficient space to address the communal question and comes up with the harmonious solution of ‘uniform nation’ with diverse communities ridden with rights to constitutional safeguards. This could obviously be derived from his argument that ‘two nations and one state is a pretty plea. It has the same attraction which a sermon has and may result in the conversion of Muslim leaders. But instead of being uttered as a sermon if is intended to issue it as an ordinance for the Muslims to obey it, will be a mad project to which no sane man will agree. It will defeat the very purpose of Swaraj’ (Ambedkar, Pakistan or Partition of India, edit., Vasant Moon, 1990, 365). Although Ambedkar was himself a believer in spiritualism at least in the private sphere and had a high regard for the values which a religion instills into mankind, he never grew into two minds on the question of a secular nation and a uniform civil-code. Ambedkar’s notion of secularism was clear as crystal and never contradicted or clashed with ‘nationalism’. Applying (on the question of secularism) Ashis Nandy’s (See, Ashis Nandy, ‘A Critique of Modernist Secularism’, op.cit., 1997) fourfold classification of political actors in India – Nehruvian model (believer neither in public nor private sphere), Mrs. Gandhi’s model (religion confined to private sphere and expelled from public sphere), Jinnah’s model (believer in public sphere and not in private sphere) and Gandhi and Khomeini’s model (an omnipresent religion in both private and public spheres) – to Ambedkar’s model of secularism, it can be asserted that with a little medication, Ambedkar’s model falls into the second category wherein religion is disallowed to encroach upon the public sphere of a nation. Ambedkar, however, would not make political use of religion the way Mrs. Gandhi did (her politicized and high profile seventy-one pilgrimages).

For a nation to continue as an organic unit, Ambedkar rules out administrative unity as an inevitable component and emphasizes upon cultural components as more valid factor to keep the nation cohesive. He begins to delineate India as a country of various nationalities functioning as warring camps against one another on communal lines. This was more evident in case of Hindus and Muslims wherein societies have undergone social-stagnation and communal aggression. He asserts that even a superficial observer cannot fail to notice that a spirit of aggression underlies the Hindu attitude towards the Muslim and the Muslim attitude towards the Hindu. He claims that both Hindus and Muslims nurture secretly the religious whims to create ‘Hindu-Raj’ and ‘Muslim-Raj’ respectively and fear the same from each other. This leads Ambedkar to suspect if the ‘two-nation theory’ will leave any room even for the growth of that sentimental desire for
unity. The spread of this virus of dualism into the body-politic must some day create a mentality which is sure to call for a life and death struggle for the dissolution of this forced union. If by reason of some superior force the dissolution does not take place, one thing is sure to happen to India, namely, that this continued union will go on sapping her vitality, loosening its cohesion, weakening its hold on the love and faith of her people and preventing the use of its moral and material resources.43

Thus we can see how firmly Ambedkar gets into the idea that communal and cultural settlement must precede any political settlement so as to give way to a culturally cohesive federal nationality. With this mind Ambedkar proceeds to write a chapter named “Must There Be Pakistan?” He begins the chapter by putting forth a set of questions like ‘Must there be Pakistan because there is communal antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims?’ and further, that ‘Is India the only country where there is communal antagonism?’ He answers the questions himself by throwing another set of questions like – ‘Is the antagonism such that there is no will to live together in one country and under one constitution?’ But then surely that will to live together was not absent till 1937. Even during the formulation of the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, both Hindus and Muslims accepted the view that they must live together under one constitution and in one country and participated in the discussions that preceded the passing of the Act.

Ambedkar takes up the Indian communal case to equate rationally with Canada, South Africa and Switzerland, to formulate another set of what seems to be nationalist questions. Juxtaposing the Indian communal situation with a number of foreign national cases, Ambedkar wonders – if communal antagonism does not come in the way of the French in Canada living in political unity with the English, if does not come in the way of the English in South Africa living in political unity with the Dutch, if it does not come in the way of the French and the Italians in Switzerland living in political unity with the Germans; why then should it be impossible for the Hindus and the Muslims to agree to live together under one constitution in India? Must there be Pakistan because Muslims have lost faith in the Congress majority? Interestingly at this point, Ambedkar brings into picture the representative credibility of a political party like Congress and even more specifically, he interrogates whether a political party like Congress could ever be a representative voice of the whole nation or even the whole majority community and most importantly, if Muslims have lost their faith in Congress, this should make no reason for the Muslims to lose their faith in majority community and create Pakistan.

Probing deeper into the same question, Ambedkar argues that the reasons for the loss of faith which Muslims cite are generally some instances of tyranny and oppression practiced by the Hindus and connived at by the Congress Ministries during the two years and the three months (1937-9) of the Congress in office. But can it be a reason, asks Ambedkar, for partitioning India? Is it not possible to hope that the voters who supported the Congress last time will grow wiser and not support the congress or may it not be that if the Congress returns to office, it will profit by the mistakes it has made, revise its mischievous policy and thereby allay the fear created by its past conduct? Again must there be Pakistan because Musalmans are a nation…? Ambedkar argues that it is a pity
that Mr. Jinnah's obsession with his new found faith in Muslim nationalism prevents him from seeing that there is a distinction between a society parts of which are disintegrated, and a society parts of which have become only loose, which no same man can ignore. When a society is disintegrating – and the two nation theory is a positive disintegration of society and country – it is evidence of the fact that there does not exist the vital force (what Carlyle calls "organic filaments") which works to bind together the parts that are cut asunder. In such cases disintegration can only be regretted rather than prevented. Where, however, such organic filaments do exist, it is a crime to overlook them and deliberately force the disintegration of society and country, as the Muslims seem to be doing. If the Musalmans want to be a different nation, Ambedkar speaks his nationalist mind; it is not because they have been but because they want to be. There is much in the Musalmans, which, if they wish, can roll them into a nation. In the same breath, he inquires if there is enough that is common to both Hindus and Musalmans, which if developed, is capable of molding them into one people?

Nobody can deny that there are many modes, manners, rites and customs, which are common to both. Nobody can deny that there are rites, customs and usages based on religion, which do divide Hindus and Musalmans. But the question is, Ambedkar makes it a point, which of these should be emphasized. If the emphasis is laid on points of difference, it will no doubt give rise to nations. Ambedkar’s nationalism goes to the rational height and his spirit of social cohesion becomes very explicit when he says that there is nothing to be ashamed of the fact that Indians are no more than a people. Nor is there any cause for despair that the people of India – if they wish – will not become one nation. For, as Disraeli once rightly said that a nation is a work of art and a work of time. History records that before the rise of nations as great corporate personalities, there were only peoples. Thus Ambedkar concludes that if the Hindus and Musalmans agree to emphasize the things that bind them and forget those that separate them, there is no reason why in course of time they should not grow into a nation. This becomes one of the most remarkable sites in Ambedkar’s nationalist Weltanschauung which has of late also been noticed by one of the contemporary noted writers, Gail Omvedt who quotes Ambedkar on nationalism – “My confident hope is that we can be a nation provided proper processes of social amalgamation can be put forth.”

The notion that an Indian nation was not an immutable reality but a project that had to be consciously undertaken was unique at the time. As Ambedkar noted, it contrasted both with the growing fundamentalist Muslim assertion that Islam provided the basis for their nationhood and with the Congress’s faith that India was already a nation, a faith that rested essentially on unstated assumptions that made the Hindu identity, deriving from the ancient Vedas, the foundation of national identity. The Hindu Mahasabha was putting the case for a Hindu Raj most forcefully, but the underlying assumptions were accepted by a majority of Congressmen (Omvedt 2002). Similarly, responding to the Hindu nationalists’ idea of nation, Ambedkar retorts that if culture was to be the basis of a nation, as the Hindu nationalists avowed, then they must concede that Muslims had every right to demand a national political framework in the areas of Islamic cultural hegemony. Ambedkar, however, did not believe that nations had to be necessarily based on a common religious-cultural identity; there were in fact several examples of multicultural
nations. Nevertheless, he argued that a people could grow into a nation. It was a question of choice, and he did not see separatism as a good choice.\textsuperscript{46}

Towards Nationalist Politics:

Having dealt with the contribution Ambedkar made to the nationalist thought, it is imperative to deal with his contribution to the nationalist politics and establish the linkages between the two. It has been baselessly argued, of late, by right-wing historians like Arun Shourie that Ambedkar played no part in the national or freedom movements. To respond to this, it becomes imperative to depict Ambedkar’s role in anti-colonial politics and nationalism. As I have already shown that nationalist discourse, as constructed in the anti-colonial phase, was neither a monopoly of Hindu nationalism nor of Congress nationalism and it was equally contributed to (both at the level of nationalist thought and politics) by the ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism of Ambedkar. Shourie’s allegation reflects the all-appropriating aspiration of the Congress nationalism to brand anyone as ‘non-participant’ into the freedom movement if he/she did not participate into a Congress-led national movement. Ambedkar’s politics begins to unfold from early 1930s onward, especially since he laid the foundation of a political party, namely, ILP.

Ambedkar’s swing to class radicalism had been forecast in 1930 in his speech at the Depressed Classes Conference in the change of name of his biweekly from Bahishkrut Bharat to Janata. Published regularly from then on, under the editorship of G.N. Sahasrabudhe, Janata began to feature lead articles with large headlines targeting the atrocities of capitalists and landlords. Articles covered not only Dalit conferences and meetings but also working-class strikes and peasant uprisings, which were occurring with more regularity. Poems illustrated the radical thrust of the Dalits’ aspiration in a combination of class and anti-caste rhetoric.\textsuperscript{47} In spite of his theoretical disagreement with Marxian atheism and violence as a means to revolution, Ambedkar seemed to have come closer in 1930s not only to the Marxian terminology but also to the political praxis. In 1936 he formed his first political party to represent the Dalits’ cause directly in the forthcoming elections. It was a party not with a specific caste but rather one with a working-class identity: the Independent Labor Party (ILP).

Its programme, published in Janata, was a social democratic one, as advanced as any socialist programme of the time. It accepted the ‘principle of state management and ownership of industry wherever it was in the interest of the people’. It promised to bring legislation to regulate the employment of factory workers, including fixing their work hours, making payment of adequate wages and providing bonus and pension schemes. It promised a general scheme of social insurance. It also proposed legislation ‘to protect agricultural tenants from the exactions and evictions by landlords in general and in particular the tenants under (a) the Khoti system and (b) the taluqdari system’, that is, the forms of zamindari prevalent in the Konkan region of Bombay and the Vidarbha region of the Central Provinces (Janata 8 August 1936).
The class identity of Ambedkar's new party became clear when the fight against the Khoti landlord system in the Konkan heated up and produced one of the major peasant mobilizations of colonial India. Five of the elected members of the ILP came from the Konkan, and two of them had been active in the Mahad Satyagraha. In September 1937 Ambedkar tabled his first legislation after the elections, a bill for abolition of the Khoti system. This was accompanied by the first march of peasants to Bombay. The Communists then, under the leadership of S.A. Dange, joined Ambedkar in his campaign and held large rallies, including one of 3000 peasants waving the red flag at Chari on 17th October and featuring Communist activists such as B.T. Ranadive and G.S. Sardesai. The climax of this organizing was a march of 20,000 peasants to the Bombay Council Hall on 12 January 1938. It was one of the biggest of the colonial period, comparable to the figure of 15,000 claimed at the All-India Kisan Congress in December 1936 during the Faizpur session of the Congress. Slogans included 'Destroy the Khot system', 'Crush sowkar rule', and 'Long live Dr. Ambedkar'. Ambedkar himself presided over the rally, and his speech illustrated his growing radicalism:

"Really seen, there are only two castes in the world the first that of the rich, and the second that of the poor. Besides that there is a middle class. This class is responsible for the destruction of all movements" (Janata 15 January 1938).

He went on to argue for organization and for awareness that the Congress was supporting the wealthy. Then he made one of the major declarations of sympathy for Marxism:

"I have definitely read studiously more books on the communist philosophy than all the communist leaders here. However beautiful the communist philosophy is in those books ... the test of this philosophy has to be given in practice. And if work is done from that perspective, I feel that the labor and length of time needed to win success in Russia will not be so much in India. And so in regard to the toilers' class struggle, I feel the communist philosophy is close to us" (Janata 15 January 1938).

The qualification regarding social issues became clear when, on 12 and 13 February 1938, Ambedkar called a Depressed Classes workers conference at Manmad, the railway centre of Maharashtra. Noting that this was the first meeting of Dalits as workers, he explained that 'social grievances are grievances under the load of which our very manhood is crushed'. Hence there were two enemies of the working class in India: Brahmanism and Capitalism. He charged his critics on the Left with failing to admit Brahmanism as a target. 'By Brahmanism I mean the negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity ... It is rampant in classes and is not confined to the Brahmins alone, though they are the originators of it' (Khairmode 1998b, 7:88-90). Nor was opposition to Brahmanism simply a matter of gaining social rights, such as inter-dining and intermarriage. Ambedkar cited citizenship rights and economic opportunities as two major social structures of Brahmanism. He concluded noting that Marx had never seen class as a decisive factor in social equality, and that in Europe nationality continued to divide workers just as caste did in India. He urged the workers to support the only political party standing for their interest, the ILP (Khairmode 1998b, 7:91).
This goes without saying that the Left movement in India has always neglected Caste both philosophically and pragmatically. They considered it an issue that would be automatically resolved in the fight for socialism and characterized Ambedkar as a ‘petty bourgeois misleader’. The socialists also treated caste as secondary which becomes obvious in Nehru’s ‘Discovery of India’ wherein he treats untouchables merely as an economic category needing an economic solution. The neglect of caste issues had its theoretical foundations in the philosophical assumptions of Marxism, and Ambedkar took this issue up in an article in the Janata, originally written in 1936 and reprinted in 1938 as a front-page article. He attacked the base-superstructure analogy of Marxism. To quote Ambedkar on this analogy, “The base is not the building. On the basis of economic relations a building is erected of religious, social and political institutions. This building has just as much reality as the base. If we want to change the base, then first the building that has been constructed on it has to be knocked down. In the same way, if we want to change the economic relations of society, then first the existing social, political and other institutions will have to be destroyed.”

He went on to argue that to build the strength of the working class, the mental hold of religious slavery would have to be destroyed; thus, eradicating caste was the precondition of a united working-class struggle(Janata 25 June 1938). Destruction of caste was taken as the main task of the ‘democratic stage’ of a two-stage revolution. The article severely criticized the Congress socialists and Nehru, arguing that the fight against untouchability would have to be built without their help. Both articles and poems published in the Janata illustrated the combining of anti-caste and class radical themes. Ambedkar’s movement-level alliance with Communists took another turn during a major industrial dispute. In an effort to check the growing influence of Communists and other radicals, the Congress ministry of Bombay province introduced an Industrial Disputes Bill before the legislature. This bill, the first of many ‘Black Acts’ against the working-class, made conciliation compulsory and, under very ill-defined conditions, strikes illegal. With an eloquent defense of the right to strike ‘as simply another name for the right to freedom’, Ambedkar took the lead in condemning it. In one of his several speeches against the bill, he argued on 15 September 1938 that ‘it should really be called the Workers Civil Liberties Suspension Act’ because ‘under the conditions prescribed by this Bill there is no possibility of any free union growing up in the country’. He went on to call it a ‘bad, bloody and brutal’ piece of legislation (Omvedt, 1982, 2: 232). Ambedkar also showed interest in the rising Kisan movement in the country. The Janata ignored efforts by Jagjivan Ram to form a Bihar State Agricultural Laborers League to counter the Bihar Kisan Sabha and reported on the Kisan movement instead. At the end of December 1938 Ambedkar had a dramatic personal meeting with its leader, Swami Sahajanand, to discuss the Congress’s position. Sahajanand believed that peasants needed an independent class organization and should join the Congress as a broad anti-imperialist organization. This was the basic Communist-Socialist line of the time. Ambedkar tried to counter it by saying that the Congress was only bolstering the interests of capitalists and others, while its support to the ‘Federation’ proposed in the Government of India Act of 1935 was undemocratic.
Ambedkar wanted to build up an anti-Congress front on the grounds of opposition to Federation, that is, to project a more democratic structure for independent India. He put forward his position in a speech, ‘Federation versus freedom’, to the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune on 29 January 1939. He stressed the undemocratic nature of the proposed federal structure, which kept paramountcy, that is, relations with the princely states, as a reserved subject and left the princes with inordinate powers. He criticized the Congress for a lack of any clear policy regarding the structure of an independent India, noting that at the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi ‘forgot that he was attending a political conference and went there as though he were going to a Vaishnava Shrine singing Narsi Mehta’s songs’ (Omvedt, 1979, 1:281-353). To Sahajanand and other pro-Congress mass leaders, Ambedkar argued that if Congress opposed the federation, then he would support the party; he also offered his support to Subhas Chandra Bose if he broke away from the Congress to form an independent party that opposed the constitutional proposals. This was an attempt to build a radical democratic front that would be an alternative to the Congress.

Subaltern Politics and Nationalist Dilemmas:

Ambedkar, being the first internationally recognized spokesperson of the subaltern politics, had this burden befalling him to prove that even the historically oppressed identity could be assertively reconciled with the nationalist cause without plunging into any secessionist complacency. But before constructing the ideological scientificity of nationalism even Ambedkar had to undergo various nationalist dilemmas only after overcoming which he was enabled to act out his nationalist passions. In one of his conversations with Gandhi, Ambedkar, reflecting this dilemma, concludes “Gandhiji, I have no homeland. How can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink?” 50 Later, in a discussion with his secretary Mahadev Desai, Gandhi admitted, “Till I went to England, I did not know he was a Harizan. I thought he was some Brahman who took a deep interest in Harizans and therefore talked intemperately” (Keer 1990, 165-68). This reaction was undoubtedly revelatory of the stereotypes about Dalits that Gandhi held. A logical interpretation of the above-mentioned quote by Gandhi would tell that Gandhi shared the commonly-held cliché (prejudice) in those days that untouchables could not speak for themselves and that in their failure to represent their own interests at the national and international level, they need a suitable representative from among the non-untouchables, may be Brahmins.

This is correctly held about the nationalist movement that one of the great failures of the Indian nationalist movement is that it took place so much at odds with the assertion of Dalits and other oppressed castes. Apparently, Dalit leadership wanted to give primacy to social reforms over political independence or at least they wanted to wage two simultaneous wars on both social and political fronts – the colonialist state was only one of the enemies, the other being the unjust pyramidal Brahminical social structure. Congress leadership, by putting the caste issue aside and treating it as secondary, gave sufficient reasons to the Dalit leadership to see them with constant mistrust on the
question of social reform. To be precise, the perpetual oscillation of even the secular nationalists over the caste issue explains why the skeptical-restless-stirrings continued in the ranks of Dalit leadership leading to the post-colonial Dalit movements. Gandhian defense of untenable pre-modern Varna-system and secularists' notion of change with ascriptive-pyramidal continuity impelled the skeptical mind of Ambedkar not only to rebuff the political nationalism of Congress but also to come out with an alternative subaltern political-nationalism. That, the constant fear and mistrust of the subaltern leadership towards Congress nationalism was not misplaced, is proved by the fact that post-colonial state and its first-generation leadership did not initiate into any remarkable social-reform measures and even at the political front, Hindu Code Bill was defeated in spite of Congress enjoying majority in the Parliament. Left historians are right to observe that subaltern masses were systematically demobilized after Independence. Ambedkar even expressed some hope that Gandhi's desire to combine social issues with political concerns would help the untouchables. Yet the Brahmanic Hindu framework of Gandhi's concerns led to a major clash with Ambedkar.

On 8 August 1930, in preparation for the First Round Table Conference, Ambedkar called an All-India Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur. Resolutions at the conference demanded immediate dominion status, rejected the Simon Commission report and asked for adult suffrage with safeguards for untouchables that included representation in legislative councils (through reserved seats if there were adult suffrage) and reservation in public service. This approval of reserved seats with a general electorate contrasted with the demands of other Indian untouchable leaders, who at that time were asking for separate electorates. Ambedkar's presidential speech elaborated on these themes. He argued forcefully that the multiplicity of castes, races, religions and languages could not come in the way of India's readiness for independence. His eloquent and scathing indictment of imperialism attacked Britain for the impoverishment of India and for doing nothing to lighten either the burden of untouchability or the exploitation of peasants and workers. Finally, his reference to 'capitalists' and 'landlords' and his characterization of the Congress leaders as 'feudalists' indicate the growing influence of socio-economic radicalism on his thinking.

The 1930 speech shows Ambedkar as a political nationalist with sensitivity towards social differences. His nationalism was one in which independence from British rule was a precondition for creating an egalitarian, caste-free society. This nationalism, like that of Phule, Periyar and other leaders of the anti-caste movement, centered mostly on issues involving the construction of the nation as a democracy, not just on the transfer of power to the Indians. It can be described as 'nation-building'. His unique contribution was to give this concept a fully modernist thrust – the society he wanted was democratic and rational, embodying Enlightenment values, expressed in the French Revolution trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity. British colonial rule was an obstacle to this. Still, it was less inimical to the untouchables than to elites, who suffered the immediate loss of power. Thus Ambedkar's attitude towards the British was more of a tactical one; as he said later, while they were his enemies, so were upper caste nationalists, and 'we cannot fight two enemies at once'.
Ambedkar was unequivocal in arguing that the political power needed by untouchables could only be won in the framework of an independent India. In his opening speech on 20 November 1930, he restated the themes of his Nagpur speech. He begins – “The bureaucratic form of Government in India should be replaced by a government which will be Government of the people... The Government of India does realize the necessity of removing the social evils which are eating into the vitals of Indian society and which have blighted the lives of the downtrodden classes for years. The Government of India does realize that the landlords are squeezing the masses dry and that the capitalists are not giving the leaders a living wage and decent conditions of labor. Yet it is a most painful thing that it has not dared to touch any of these evils... We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us as long as the British Government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power in our own hands... we know that political power is passing from the British into the hands of those who wield such tremendous economic, social and religious sway over our existence. We are willing that it may happen (Omvedt, 1982, 2: 503 04).

He argued throughout the Round Table Conferences for adult suffrage and a more unitary constitution in which the powers of the states would be minimized. He and other Dalit leaders asserted that separate electorates for Muslims were more dangerous than those for Dalits. An article in Bahiskrut Bharat in 1929 criticized the Nehru Report, a major scheme outlining the Congress’s proposal for Dominion Status. Ambedkar argued that ‘by giving political concessions to Muslims the country will be ruined, but Brahmans won’t... By giving concessions to non-Brahmans the country won’t be ruined but Brahmans will be destroyed’ (Bahiskrut Bharat 18 January 1929).

Much like Marx’s rebuttal of peasants as rural idiocy and only secondary to the revolution, Ambedkar also undermined the role of what he called ‘rural-republics’ in social transformation. While criticizing the much eulogized ancient system of village panchayats, Ambedkar calls it the bane of public life of India. He believes that if India has not succeeded in building up a national spirit, the chief reason is the existence of the village system. It made all people saturated with local particularism, and local patriotism. It left no room for larger civic-spirit. Under the ancient village panchayats, India, instead of being a country of a united people, became a loose conglomeration of village communities with no common tie except a common allegiance to a common king.

During a debate in Assembly in 1932, Ambedkar quotes R.G. Pradhan saying ‘the excessive village patriotism and village spirit which these communities fostered proved fatal to the growth of a strong Indian nationality based on the realization of territorial unity of India as a whole or of the racial unity of each of our natural territorial divisions’. To Ambedkar, villages were ‘cesspools’ that harbored caste oppression and social and economic backwardness. This had been clear since his earliest article on smallholdings in agriculture. For the Depressed classes, village society meant dependence. In contrast, it was the urban, industrial society hated by Gandhians that represented a way out for Dalits. Thus it becomes clear how Ambedkar comes closer to Marx in terms of the
salvation of the oppressed – proletarian workers or subaltern Dalits – lies in the march towards urban centers.

**Juxtaposing the Statesmanship of Ambedkar with Gandhi:**

To begin with, we might proceed with the value-neutral examination of the nature of statesmanship of Ambedkar and more precisely what are the areas wherein his leadership could qualitatively or popularly be identified and differentiated with the statesmanship of Gandhi and Nehru. Undertaking the task of a comparative study of two qualitatively different leaderships of anticolonial nationalism becomes much more important in the post-modern era of narratives, where nation itself has been seen as narration. In this age of narratives, a leadership has been analyzed theoretically not only on the basis of its political activities and journalistic write-ups but also on the basis of the personal life (his attire, food-fads, hobbies, sense of humor and so on) that the concerned leader lives.

Starting with Ambedkar, it is believed by many scholars that during his lifetime, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played three roles: that of a caste leader, that of an Untouchable spokesman, and that of national statesman. In his first leadership role, he was guide, guru and decision maker for his own caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra, from the mid-twenties of the 20th century until his death. From the early 1930s onwards he was the chief spokesman of the Untouchables even in the eyes of the colonialist state. In his third role, he spoke on all phases on India’s development, worked on problems of labor and law as a member of the Government, and even put aside some of his own theories to help create a viable, generally accepted constitution.

Eleanor Zelliott is keen on describing Ambedkar in his first role as Caste leader or as Babasaheb, an affectionate term of respect used by the Mahars. This is patently unfair to Ambedkar, who never saw himself as merely a caste leader and who only once called a conference or founded an institution that was meant for Mahars alone. However, Ambedkar's first and chief support was from his own caste, and this massive support is what enabled him to work effectively in larger circles. A narrow approach which examined how he led and why his caste responded to him with such devotion may point toward an understanding of leadership among other inarticulate, low-status groups in a changing society. A close look at the Mahars at the time Ambedkar rose to leadership among them may point to the factors which produce readiness for change among a depressed people. Ambedkar’s presence created a new image. He appeared at a time of incipient changes among the Mahars. Building on a movement which had just begun, Ambedkar designed, over the years, an ideology and a program which counteracted negative self-images, made use of Mahar virtues, and urged the Mahar toward every channel open to participation in a modernizing democratizing India. In the end he left the caste with new images and legends, and with a new history as past and present Buddhists. In the words of an older Mahar, “He took us to the stars.” A stanza from a recent poem is not as sophisticated as much current Buddhist writing, but it reveals the awesome place Ambedkar holds in the hearts of his people, and the innovation he represents:
Lord Beema

The Emancipator-Spartacus
The Philosopher-Socrates
The Law-giver-Aristotle
The Orator-Demosthenes
The Samson of Intellect
The Nation’s Architect
The New-epoch Builder
Lincoln-Lenin-Ambedkar

The image of Ambedkar as it is so often depicted in the homes of the Buddhists and in statues in the railway towns of Maharashtra is almost always as a westernized man, complete with a coat, shirt, tie, shoes, fountain pen and usually a book [representing the Constitution]. Zelliot believes that the personality which Ambedkar presented with that elitist image was arrogant, caustic, aggressive, determined. To realize the impact of this figure, she holds, one must place it alongside the stereotype of Mahar. But this hermeneutic symbolism of Ambedkar’s icon, to my understanding, requires a re-reading, particularly in the sense that the presentation of this so-called arrogant and elitist iconification of Ambedkar needs to be purged of negative-interpretative connotation. Ambedkar’s self-presentation as a well-determined westernized man was not reflective of either a spontaneous arrogance or blind imitation of the West in him but was a conscious and well thought-out decision of presenting an alternative style of leadership which would not only characterize an un-Gandhian style of leadership but also in itself be the symbol of progress. Western attires like coat, tie and shirt were always regarded by the masses in India as the mark of superiority and progress to have been donned solely by the ruling class. Ambedkar’s donning the western attire seeks to base its leadership on this mindset of the masses and untouchables in particular. Apart from this, it also signifies, especially for the untouchables, a remarkable break from the oppressive Brahminic past – a sine qua non for progress – in the light of the fact that untouchables, having been the worst victim of ‘purity and pollution’ theory for thousands of years, had earned notoriety for their filthy living styles and dirty food-habits (as it was assumed then) like clarion-eating. Knowing this pathetic state of affairs [of untouchables], Ambedkar chose to rule out a leadership with indigenous outfit (Kurta, Dhoti and Gandhian Cap) and unlike Gandhians did not place his nationalism on the traditional outfit. This is mainly where Zelliot might be contested, to the effect that Ambedkar’s self-presentation of his western self was not an act in arrogance or imitation but a symbolic act of radical statesmanship and prophetic deliverance.

In 1918, a professor in the University of London recommended him for his extraordinary practical ability, adding: “his character is rather Scotch-American; though in appearance he is a fat Indian.” Toward the end of his life, when Ambedkar did wear Indian dress, a rather romantic American writer described him as “handsome”, “jet-eyed”, and looking like “a serious bespectacled Roman Senator in his immaculate white Indian robes.” While Gandhi’s saint-peasant garb, to Zelliot, reinforced the identity with the Indian masses he sought, Ambedkar’s western dress and his independent critical temperament
underlined the new identity he sought for the Mahar. Ambedkar brought together an iconoclastic maharajatika image, an elite stance, and the kind of “incendiary, explosive, inspiring” protest Maharashtra had seen earlier in such Brahman nationalists as Lokamanya Tilak and Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar.58

Both Mohandas K. Gandhi and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar are known to different groups, as the “Savior of the Untouchables”. Gandhi was a caste Hindu who is said to have spoken and written more on untouchability than on any other subject. Gandhi publicly put the abolition of untouchability, along with Hindu-Muslim unity, as the essential prerequisite for India’s true independence. He also made popular the term “Harijan” (children of God) for the untouchables. Ambedkar was the most highly educated Untouchable in India, recognized by many as the chief spokesperson of the Untouchables, the founder of a political party for Untouchables, and the moving spirit behind organizations, schools and colleges established for their uplift. One of Ambedkar’s final acts was the initiation of a Buddhist conversion movement that ultimately attracted more than 3 million Untouchable adherents. On the day after Ambedkar’s death, Nehru described him as “a symbol of the revolt against all the oppressive features of Hindu society” (New York Times, 6 December 1956).

Despite their common concern, Ambedkar and Gandhi were often at odds in their programs for the abolition of untouchability. In 1932 Gandhi thwarted Ambedkar’s attempt to gain political concessions from the British, concessions that Ambedkar believed to be essential for the Untouchable’s progress. Ambedkar retaliated by criticizing Gandhi more harshly than he did the orthodox Hindus who upheld untouchability as a religious essential. Gandhi may be described as a dominant group leader working for a national goal who was concerned, both from a moral standpoint and from a realization of the need for unity, about injustices to a low status group within the nation. Ambedkar’s correlative role was that of the militant leader of a politically conscious segment of the same depressed group. Seen in this light, the conflict between these two men has some parallels with certain aspects of Black Power movement versus “White Liberals” in America of the 1960s.59

The Indian socio-political situation, however, included several unique elements absent in the Western milieu, for instance, amidst other things the peculiarities of Gandhian and Ambedkarite leadership. Gandhi’s autobiography, which covers his life up to 1921, when he was fifty-two, contains only a few references to Untouchables or untouchability. The most striking reference is the story of his insistence on the admission of an Untouchable family to the ashram he had established near Ahmedabad in 1915. At the time of his assumption of leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920, Gandhi made what seemed to be his first strong public statement on untouchability. They reflect his dual role as Mahatma and politician in Indian life, already apparent at that time. As politician, Gandhi said: “Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity” (Young India, 29 December 1920). As Gandhi said: “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable…” (Young India, 27 April 1921). As both Mahatma and politician, Gandhi sought to weave the divergent interests in India into a unified opposition to the British, at
the same time trying to pursue a course of reform without rending the social fabric of Indian society. In Dalton’s words, “Indian society saw Gandhi, and Gandhi regarded himself, as occupying the peculiar position of a figure above the discord around him, and uniquely capable of harmonizing it”.

Gandhi inherited the Congress position on untouchability first recorded in a resolution in 1917 which urged “upon the people of India the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed upon the Depressed Classes”. Gandhi’s contribution to the position was to personalize it. Volunteers for the Non-Cooperation Campaign in 1921 signed a pledge which placed responsibility on the individual: “As a Hindu I believe in the justice and necessity of removing the evil of untouchability and shall on all possible occasions seek personal contact with and endeavor to render service to the submerged classes”. This emphasis on the caste Hindu’s obligations to the untouchables remained a major tenet of Gandhi’s teaching. Gandhi’s statements on the evil of untouchability were unequivocal from the first, although his views regarding other caste-based practices changed and grew less orthodox with the years. In 1920 he voiced moderate opposition to social intercourse between castes which some reformers advocated: “Interdining, interdrinking, intermarrying...are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy” (Young India, 8 December 1920). Twenty-six years later, he said, “If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harizan husbands” (Harijan, 7 July 1946). Underlying Gandhi’s change in attitude toward social practices was an unchanging belief in varnashramadharma, the divinely ordained division of society into four groups defined according to duty: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

Thus we can conclusively state that there were larger differences than similarities between the two most influential leaderships of India. But the most striking similarity between the two personalities lies in the fact that both of them were equally great champions of truth and non-violence. But both of them, although taking the same western education and using the same means of truth and non-violence, arrived at the different conclusions. Spiritually while Gandhi remained a Hindu, Ambedkar became a Buddhist; politically, while the former remained a pre-modern anarchist, the latter conformed largely to social-liberalism. One remarkable difference between the two is that there is something mysteriously inexplicable about Gandhian romanticist charisma which probably separates him not only from Ambedkar but also from all of his western-educated contemporaries. It is the presence of this mysterious Hindu element in Gandhi which gave him the image of ‘Holy man/Mahatma-in-politics’ for not only political liberation but also spiritual emancipation. Gandhi developed a politico-religious vocabulary which was not inconsistent with the age-old mythic traditions of Hindu peasants. More than any thing Gandhi was the greatest leader of the uneducated rural peasants and could unquestionably be held responsible for converting peasants into Indians. Interestingly, Gandhi himself was able to foresee the politico-spiritual strategic means which would establish him as a god-incarnated amongst the peasants. It was this foresight in Gandhi which made him prepared like a General-for-war and more precisely which made him shed his Western clothes to don semi-nudity and sing “Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram...” For a variety of reasons this whole package of Gandhian ideology
appealed to the masses and made Gandhi—a mass-mover... a mass-psychologist and a leader of the people. Gandhi could be compared with romanticist Rousseau who was negating Reason in the ‘Age of Reason and Enlightenment’; in the same way, Gandhi in the era of modernity rejected everything modern quite unlike his Western-educated contemporaries. But unfortunately the rural masses of India had no interest in the rather intellectual and sophisticated statesmanship of either Congressmen or communists or even Hindu nationalists. They were able only to comprehend Gandhi’s simple-minded vocabulary. If educated Congressmen like Nehru, J.P. and so on gave legitimacy to the Gandhian ideology, it is primarily because Gandhi became the mass leader rather than because they were self-convinced. This is evident in the Indian constitution and State which do not reflect anything Gandhian in spite of Congress taking over the Indian state as the successor of Gandhi.

But Ambedkar was different from these sophisticated Congressmen in spite of taking the same education, especially as he had to play the role of social-emancipator at least for the untouchables and it is here that he shares something in common with Gandhi insofar as Ambedkar, like Gandhi, was filled with practical programmes for the untouchables and political mobilization of the same. Unlike most of the secularists of Congress, Ambedkar was realistic in his approach and preferred to nurture only those ideas which could be reified in socio-economic realms.

Ambedkar’s Trinity: Liberty, Equality & Fraternity

Ambedkar’s ideological framework remains far from completion unless his socio-political trinity—liberty, equality and fraternity—is taken into account. This seemingly political trinity could easily be mistaken to have been borrowed superficially from the French Revolution. But in spite of all the inspirations which Ambedkar drew from the French Revolution and more precisely from the sacrifice which the privileged ruling class of 18th century France had the courage to make, it can not be plainly said that this political phrase was out and out a European import. Ambedkar not only reexamined the phrase but also reshaped it by giving a deeper social meaning than the French Revolutionaries in a caste ridden society like India. In this context, Prof Rodrigues holds that “He (Ambedkar) saw freedom, equality and fraternity as essential conditions for a good life and argued that they should be understood and pursued as one entity. It was only on their foundation that a comprehensive regime of rights could be built. While different moral and religious pursuits might be reasonable, the premises of liberty and equality suggest that they are unavoidable. Once social agents are conceived of as free and equal, a plurality of moral and religious pursuits and identities inevitably beget themselves” (See Valerian Rodrigues’ The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar, 2002, 39-40).

Liberty:

The problem of liberty involves the adjustment of claims between individual and society. The state comes into the picture because it is the instrument or agency for regulating their
relations. If the claim of the individual is stretched to an extreme in utter disregard of the interest of society, liberty would be reduced to 'license'. On the other hand, if the liberty of the individual is increasingly restricted in the supposed interest of society, the result would be an unconditional submission to authority, hence the loss of liberty. It is therefore essential to draw equilibrium between liberty and license on the one hand and liberty and authority on the other. Liberty, therefore, has been one of the most debated terms ever since the arrival of modernity in Western Europe. All the ideologies, across the nations and ages, have been at war with one another to claim their own authorities on the interpretation of 'liberty'. The Classical Liberals (Locke, Bentham, Spencer and Sidgwick, etc.) defined liberty in terms of non-intervention of state into individuals' life for they believed that individuals were the best judges of their own interests and state had no right to impose its own conception of 'good' on the individuals in their mutual dealings. This notion of liberty was called 'negative liberty' and was criticized as the liberty of the rich and strong against the poor and weak. The exponents of 'negative liberty' were also flayed for encouraging the doctrine of laissez-faire and minimal state where only the fittest could survive; as to them society was nothing more than an aggregate of atomized, alienated individuals, joined together by a bond of mechanical unity.

By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century this idea of 'negative liberty' was revised in favor of 'positive liberty' by the 'Modern or Left Liberals' like J.S. Mill, Green, Hobhouse, Laski and so on. These thinkers saw a positive role for the state in securing a social welfare even if it implied curbing liberty of the individual to some extent. Hobhouse and Laski postulated that private property was no absolute right, and that the state must secure the welfare of the people – no matter if it is constrained to curtail economic liberty of the privileged few.

It is significant that political thought of the early exponents of positive liberty is associated with the theory of welfare state, which first appeared in England and then spread to other parts of the world. Positive liberty is now regarded as an essential compliment of negative liberty in all modern states. However, some contemporary liberal thinkers, known as Libertarians have sought to lay renewed emphasis on negative liberty. Of these, Isaiah Berlin, F.A. Hayek, Milton Friedman and Robert Nozick are the most prominent. This doctrine of neo-liberalism believes that individual liberty is best secured in a society characterized by the private ownership of means of production, which, in turn, is the hallmark of capitalism. It continues to adhere to 'free' and 'competitive market mechanism' vis-à-vis central planning as an alternative to organizing the economic life of society. As Milton Friedman (1962) argues, "Economic arrangements play a dual role in the promotion of a free society. On the other hand, freedom in economic arrangements is itself a component of freedom. Broadly understood so, economic freedom is also an end in itself. In the second place, economic freedom is also an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom".

A major reason for the preference of the liberals for free market economy or competitive capitalism over central planning stems from the supposed superiority of the former vis-à-vis the latter in 'efficient' economic organization of society. According to them, this
efficiency is ensured through the freedom to the individual economic agents, who adjust the exchange decision to the changing economic phenomena within and outside the country, which in turn are known through information system. Thus for Hayek (1944), democracy and socialism are just juxtaposed as substitutes. To quote him, “Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible values to each man. Socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word, equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude”.64

Hayek cites Max Eastman with approval: “It seems obvious to me now... that the institution of private property is one of the main things that have given man that limited amount of freedom and equalness that Marx hopes to render infinite by abolishing this institution. Strangely enough Marx was first to see this. He is one who informed us, looking backwards that the evolution of private capitalism with its faith in market had been a precondition for the evolution of all our democratic freedoms. It never occurred to him, looking forward, that if this was so, these other freedoms might disappear with the abolition of the free market”.65

Ambedkar approached the issue of economic structure and its profound impact on liberty from a perspective different from that of Hayek and Friedman. According to Ambedkar, in a private enterprise system based on the private ownership of means of production, which operates solely for individual profit motive, the employers command a dominating position and the resourceless workers have to surrender to their dictates. In a private enterprise system a number of people (wage earners of all kinds), “have to subject themselves to be governed by the private employers”, and as a result “have to relinquish their constitutional rights in order to get their living”. Thus, the private enterprise system “undermines, if it does not actually violate, the last two premises on which democracy rests” (GOM, 1979: 404).

Ambedkar recognized the importance of the fundamental rights of an individual whom, as we have seen above, he considered an end in himself. But he went a step further. He did not want the enactment of the fundamental rights in an ornamental sense, but was eager to see that these rights are really enjoyed by the people. Thus, if the fundamental rights were not to remain notional in nature and hence worthless in practice, an appropriate economic institutional arrangement had to be created where the individual would be able to practice his rights.66 Mungekar cites Ambedkar with approval, “The fear of starvation, the fear of losing a house, the fear of losing savings if any, the fear of having to be a burden on public charity, are factors too strong to permit a man to stand out for his fundamental rights. The unemployed are thus compelled to relinquish their fundamental rights for the sake of securing the privilege to work and to subsist.”67

According to Ambedkar, state socialism could bring us out of this predicament. As seen earlier, according to the libertarian view, the intervention of state in the social and economic affairs of society results in the encroachment of individual liberty and more the intervention, the greater the encroachment. Considering the fact that “where the state
refrains from intervention what remains is liberty” (GOM, 1979, 410), Ambedkar posed a fundamental and somewhat polemical question, “To whom and for whom is this liberty?” He argued that (in a society based on private enterprise), “this liberty is the liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and to reduce rate of wages. This must be so and cannot be otherwise. For an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals, someone must make rules, so that workers must run and the wheels must run on. If the state does not do it then the private employer will do it, life otherwise will become impossible. In other words, what is called liberty from the control of state is another name for the dictatorship of private employers” (Ibid: 41).

It is often argued that the capitalist system gives the individual the right to ‘freedom of contract’. For Ambedkar the more important question was: what is the result of freedom of contract on the parties to contract, should they happen to be unequal? In an inequitable society based on the private ownership of means of production, though the idea of freedom of contract became sanctified and was upheld in the name of liberty, it “gave the strong the opportunity to defraud the weak” (GOM, 1991: 108).

Equality:

Ambedkar was at pains to notice the grave existing contradiction between the political system known as parliamentary democracy and capitalist form of industrial organization. According to him, economic inequalities are inherent in the capitalist economy, which make political equality assured by democracy worthless. This lands us in the unavoidable situation of equality in politics and inequality in economics. Thus, according to Ambedkar, the failure to recognize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy has vitiated parliamentary democracy. Ambedkar maintained therefore that though “parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty, it never made a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavor to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and left a progeny of inequalities”.

Thus we can draw from this the essence of what the learned doctor implies by equality and further that it grows incompatible with the capitalist society.

Fraternity:

Liberty and equality are the central emphasis of a democratic society, and yet they are by themselves inadequate. According to Ambedkar, a genuine democratic society necessitates the fulfillment of the third fundamental: fraternity. Ambedkar discovered that no nationalism could be complete unless the spirit of fraternity is imbibed by the concerned society. In Indian society, caste-system has killed this civic spirit and thus obstructed the making of nation out of multiple nationalities in India. Thus he invokes the indispensable element of fraternity to carve out a nation. Besides Ambedkar’s notion of ‘fraternity’ also reflects his nationalist spirit in the sense that he does not interpret it
simply with the implications French revolution provided but goes beyond to trace it into Indian anthropology and particularly into Buddhist literature.

**Caste vis-à-vis Nationalism:**

As stated earlier, nationalism is the term invented in Europe by the social scientists who never encountered caste in their own society and therefore, they never bothered to implicate or problematize caste in nationalism. Caste was the specific problem to Indian social context and hence the burden to problematize it in the project of nationalism also fell upon the shoulders of the spokespersons of Indian nationalism. In the Indian national movement only two leaders – Gandhi and Ambedkar – recognized caste as a worth discussing issue and the rest of the Western educated socialist leadership rebuffed it as a non-issue. While Gandhi agreed to talk about it, he showed little interest in its radical elimination; on the contrary, he wanted to conserve it in the veil of theory of Varna. Thus it can be argued that of all the leaders of Indian national movement, it was only Ambedkar who chose to problematize caste vis-à-vis nationalism and propose a permanent solution in terms of uncompromising annihilation of caste.

Aloysius cites Upendra Baxi (‘Collective Conspiracy to hush up Babasaheb’s Burning Thoughts’, Dalit Voice, 1-15 April, 1991, pp. 15-21.) with approval that while a conspiratorial silence prevails within social sciences as to Ambedkar’s contribution to the understanding of modern India, in the quasi-sacred realm of ‘nationalism’, his touch is considered positively polluting. To Aloysius, the trend was set early in the century by the nationalist leaders: Ambedkar stood away from the Indian National Congress (INC) in its struggle against the British; this posture often landed him, wittingly or not, in the camp of the latter; this clearly meant that he was a stooge of the British, worked against the freedom of the country and hence an anti-national. This simplistic and mindless argument repeated ad nauseam by many, from C. Rajagopalachari to Arun Shourie, is faithfully reflected by the academics, particularly by the historiographers, whether imperialist or nationalist, elitist or subalternist. Ambedkar became also an academic untouchable.69

Nevertheless, of late and especially since the emergence of subaltern historiography, new counter-claims are being made on behalf of the historically marginalized personalities and literature. According to these claims and particularly in the light of the spread of socio-political consciousness among the subaltern classes, a review of Ambedkar’s ideology of nationalism is in order and within such a review, the marginalized personality and his ideology is likely to emerge as strikingly modern, meaningful and challenging (Aloysius, 2007). Aloysius adequately makes two preliminary points here. Of all the modern Indian ideologies, Ambedkar alone attempted to elaborate a full-fledged theory of nationalism and sought to apply it critically to the Indian situation. Within the nationalist movement itself theoretical reflections and justifications were virtually non-existent. While one section asserted that India as Hindu has been eternal and that the nation is merely waking up from its long stupor, imposed on it by its external enemies, the other section kept repeating the phrase “a nation-in-the-making” whenever difficulties arose. One could almost sense in general a theoretical unease with the concept of
nationalism, which was duly branded as Western, whenever the situation demanded. Against this, Ambedkar alone grappled with this idea and ideology of nineteenth century Europe, deconstructed it as to what is perennial and peripheral in it and showed how it could critically be applied to the peculiarities of the colonial Indian situation. Secondly, Ambedkar’s thoughts in general and on nationalism in particular are not merely ideas or opinions of a great thinker. They are aspects of a collective ideology operating as a motor-force, and in struggle with other ideologies in a fast-changing society. This means that to discuss the nationalist thought of Ambedkar is to engage in the exercise of deconstruction of the INC with which it was locked in irreconcilable conflict. Those who prefer to move away from this rather, unpleasant task and to camouflage the antagonism between the two ideologies not only misrepresent Ambedkar but also do not advance the cause of social sciences.70

The two concepts, caste and nation, in Ambedkar’s opinion, represent a contradiction and a site of tension between the actual and the ideal or between the present and the future. For Ambedkar, caste and nation stand in sharp contrast to each other. They are incompatible as the two are constructed on two different and mutually opposed principles of social organization. This contrast is essential to Ambedkar’s thought, and in this disjunction his subsequent elaboration of nationalism rests. Caste calls for closure and nation for openness; the one is based on rigidity and stability and the other presumes flexibility and mobility; and again, the one insists on graded inequality and the other aspires to a standardized equality.71

To say that the people of India everywhere, at least the majority of them who have come to be known as Hindus, are found to be members of one or another identifiable caste, more or less distinct in habits, customs, traditions and even worship and belief, is to state the obvious. Despite functional interactions and mechanical cooperation, these castes are generally exclusive and inward looking and their insulation is underwritten by mandatory endogamy.72 In this way, communication, common participation and mutual sharing are severely restricted between individuals and groups belonging to different castes. Secondly, these caste, numerous though they are, form among themselves some sort of hierarchy embodying differential rights and liabilities. The rights increase as one ascends the ladder, and so the liability as one descends it. As Ambedkar repeatedly states, the castes form “an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt”.73 To quote him again, “the castes are not merely non-social, often they are anti-social.”74 Thirdly, the caste system and spirit promotes rigidity of station in life and fixity of occupation. While this is generally true for all castes, its application is more rigorous in the case of the lower ones – Shudras and Ati-Shudras – who anyway do not have much choice in the matter.

While juxtaposing Ambedkar’s theories of nationalism with those of modern theorists of nationalism we find that there is an interface between Ambedkar’s nationalism and recent authors on nationalism like Anderson and Gellner. Benedict Anderson, for instance, states: “Nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.”75 Ernest Gellner elaborates it: “a mere category of persons becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of
the shared membership of it. It is their recognition as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation.\textsuperscript{76} In the same manner Ambedkar also defines nation as a social feeling or a feeling of corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. Thus it can easily be deduced from this that caste insulation and exclusivism is incompatible with the ideal and ideology of the nation. This basic social posture of indiscriminate openness towards one and all members of the presumed nation is called fraternity. To quote Anderson again, “ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it (the Nation) possible.”\textsuperscript{77} Fraternity in its turn engenders a mental attitude of fair play and equality towards the co-nationalists. The nucleus of caste as Varna – graded inequality or hierarchy or differential privileges and liabilities, in short the consideration of superiority/inferiority on the basis of birth – will have no place in the nation (Aloysius, 2007).

Bryan Turner maintains, “The existence of the citizens presupposes a certain decline in the dominance of hierarchical social structure and emergence of egalitarian horizontal relationships.”\textsuperscript{78} Social endosmosis along with the homogenization of power within society as equality leads to a situation in which every man has a right and liberty “to property, tools and materials as being necessary for earning a living of his own choice”. This again is contrary to a caste-based society where persons “are compelled to carry on certain prescribed callings which are not of their choice”.\textsuperscript{79} Gellner again affirms the virtual cession of all hereditary occupations in a nation.\textsuperscript{80}

Nation, then, according to both Ambedkar as well as the recent social science theorists, refers to a segment of people larger than those constituted by primary relationships but suffused with the socio-psychological feeling of mutuality and comradeship, and engaged in actual and active sharing and communion. Quoting profusely Renan’s celebrated essay, Ambedkar explains that nation is a plebiscite demonstrated and thereby renewed and strengthened daily through innumerable ways of collective and corporate thought processes and activities. The three characteristics, which Ambedkar found operative within caste – exclusivism, gradedness and rigidity – meet their opposite in the three virtues of fraternity, equality and liberty as functional and foundational for any nation. Aloyisius rightly makes a point here that if pre-modern India was composed of several castes as quasi-culture or power groups, the modern Indian nation is to be comprised of the principles and ideology, precisely of castelessness. If castelessness is translated into modern political theory as equality, this does not mean that these are peculiar to the western societies. They are to be found in varying degrees within all cultures as the aspirations of the lower orders and, as Ambedkar points out, certainly within the Indian heterodox traditions.\textsuperscript{81}

Ambedkar has given sufficient space to address the question of how caste and nation can not co-exist. One explanation he gives is that within a formally unified society the danger is that the groups will develop what are called ‘their own interests’ and these would cause mischief to others outside them. This practical insight of Ambedkar can easily be grasped within the theoretical elaboration of nationalism as congruence between culture and power. In the context of the nation’s emergence the ideal is that the totality of power goes along with the totality of culture: in other words, there is equal spread of power over
again, without this equal spread of power over culture, imagining of the nation will certainly not be in the singular but plural, competitive and conflicting. Within Ambedkar’s thought the concept as well as the reality of nation looms very large. Nation is an ideal-typical construct, a social category built around certain principles. A serious and ideological commitment engendering an equally serious change in social and societal relations at least is necessary prerequisite to actualize the nation as a political entity. In the concrete context of the subcontinent, this demands that caste in all its dimensions, both the system and spirit whether understood in its pristine vedic-shastraic purity or in its degraded and distorted nineteenth century form, be renounced once and for all as an ideology and principle of social order and organization; and move towards another form of society and social relations. This ideological renunciation and a 're-socialization' (of the masses) is the conditio sine qua non for the desire to constitute an independent polity.82

Subaltern Critique of Congress nationalism:

As mentioned above, Congress nationalism could be split into two different types – indigenous nationalism claimed by Gandhi and imported Fabian-Socialist nationalism claimed by Nehru amongst others. Both these subtypes of nationalism fed into each other claiming simultaneously to be different and identical with each other. Ambedkar has severely criticized in his famous work “What Gandhi and Congress Have Done to the Untouchables” both Gandhism as the doom of the Untouchables and pseudo-secularism of Congress nationalism. In this work, Ambedkar has discussed in detail the ideology of Gandhism and half-hearted efforts of Congressmen to uproot untouchability from the Hindu society. Gandhi not only wanted to preserve the caste and Varna system but also rejected inter-dining and inter-marrying as the means to actualize social unity. More than that Gandhi also ruled out the representation of untouchables in the Harizan Sevak Sangh – a Gandhian organization meant to work for the abolition of untouchability. As far as socialist ideology of Congress is concerned, Ambedkar does not question the scientificity of ideology itself but the very intension and honest will to carry it out. Ambedkar also saw skeptically Nehru’s self-proclaimed adherence to socialist-atheism in particular when he participated wholeheartedly in all the Hindu rituals at the death of his father.

Having dealt already with Gandhian nationalism and Ambedkar’s criticism of it, the focus now would be shifted on the subaltern critique of Nehruvian nationalism. Gail Omvedt notes that the socialists also treated caste as secondary and Nehru provides a prime example. He wrote about feeling annoyed with Gandhi for having chosen as a focus for his 1932 fast the incidental issue of separate electorates, though he later marveled at the way it energized the people. Nonetheless, he continued to believe that the basic question was economic: untouchables were a landless proletariat.83 In reply to a question about caste in an interview on 4 February 1936 in London, he said, ‘Take the depressed classes, they really are the proletariat in the economic sense; the others are the better off people. All these matters are to be converted into economic terms, and then we can understand the position better (cited in Omvedt’s ‘Ambedkar’, 2004). Later, in his presidential address to the 1936 Lucknow Congress on 12 April, he declared, ‘For a
socialist [the problem of untouchability presents no difficulties] for under socialism there can be no differentiation and victimization' (Ibid.). So deep was this conviction of the primacy of economics over all other forms of differentiation such as caste, gender and ethnicity that it is no wonder that Ambedkar became increasingly suspicious of Indian Socialists.

The neglect of caste issues had its theoretical foundations in the philosophical assumptions of Marxism, and Ambedkar took this issue up in an article in the Janata, originally written in 1936 and reprinted in 1938 as a front-page article. The article severely criticized the Congress socialists and Nehru, arguing that the fight against untouchability would have to be built without their help.

Aloysius goes one step radically ahead in calling, Congress socialists in general and Nehru in particular, ideologues of cultural nationalism. He regarded Nehru's 'Discovery of India' as by far the most nostalgic and consciously woven text. The most striking characteristic of this, what he calls myth-history, is the idea that the nation in the subcontinent is ancient, despite occasional claims to the contrary, and is to be identified unambiguously with the Aryans or Indo-Aryans, later called Hindus. Nehru was of the opinion that unlike other conquerors of ancient times, our Aryan ancestors did not annihilate or 'enslave' the defeated people but in benevolence civilized them by inclusion within the Aryan fold i.e. the nation, as the 'dasa-shudras' in accordance with their natural tendencies and aptitudes. Aloysius cites Nehru from 'Discovery of India': "... at a time when it was customary for the conquerors to exterminate or enslave the conquered races, caste enabled a more peaceful solution which fitted in with the growing specialization of functions. Life was graded and out of the mass of agriculturalists evolved the Vaishyas, the artisans and merchants; the Kshatriyas or rulers and warriors; and the Brahmins, priests and thinkers who were supposed to guide policy and preserve and maintain the ideals of the nation. Below these there were the Shudras or laborers and unskilled workers other than the agriculturalists. Among the indigenous tribes many were gradually assimilated and given a place at the bottom of the social scale that is among the Shudras. The process of assimilation was a continuous one. These castes must have been in a fluid condition; rigidity came in much later (see Aloysius, 1997).

Nehru regarded the Kushan period as one of 'invasion by strange peoples with strange customs' who 'not only broke up India's political structure but endangered her cultural ideals and social structures also'. In response to this new threat, then, an anti-foreigner resistance movement against the Kushans took shape which, to Nehru, was the first nationalist upheaval in the subcontinent, successfully re-establishing the 'nation'. Buddhism, he believed, had a nationalist background but by becoming a world religion, it had abdicated its nationalist role. Thus it was natural for the old Brahminic faith to become the symbol again and again of nationalist revivals (J. Nehru, 1946:138). Thus to Nehru, the Brahminic nationalist movement of the Kushan period produced a strong anti-foreigner sentiment, brought about a Brahmin-Kshatriya coalition in defense of their homeland and culture, and ushered in a 'revitalized nation' in the Golden Age of the imperial Guptas during which an 'attempt was made to build up a homogenous state based on old Brahminic ideals. He also believed that Muslims had nothing substantial to
add to the great Indo-Aryan civilization as in technique and in methods of production and industrial organization they were much inferior to what then prevailed in India (Nehru, 1946: 267).

Although he admits that the coming of British to the subcontinent meant a radical change in the Indian social structure and cultural ideals. In this context, the following is how Nehru envisioned the role of the nation: "The conflict is between two approaches to the problem of social organization which are directly opposed to each other... The Caste system does not stand by itself; it is a part and an integral part of a much larger social organization. It may be possible to some of its obvious abuses and to lessen its rigidity and yet to leave the system intact. But that is highly unlikely as the social and economic forces at play are not much concerned with this superstructure... It has ceased to be a question of whether we like caste or dislike it. But it is certainly in our power to mould those changes and direct them, so that we can take full advantage of the character and genius of the Indian people as a whole, which have been so evident in the cohesiveness and stability of the social organization they built up. Sir George Birdwood has said somewhere: ‘So long as the Hindus hold to the Caste system India will be India; but from the day they break from it, there will be no more India’... But there is some truth in what Sir George Birdwood said, though probably he did not look at it from this point of view. The break-up of a huge and long standing social organization may well lead to a complete disruption of social life, resulting in absence of cohesion... Perhaps disruption is inevitable... Nevertheless we cannot just disrupt and hope for something better... In the constructive schemes that we may make we have to pay attention to the human material, to the background of its thought and urges and to the environment in which we have to function. To ignore all this and to fashion some idealistic scheme in the air or merely to think in terms of imitating what others have done elsewhere would be folly (Nehru, ibid., 246-47).

This citation from Nehru could be interpreted in a number of ways but one common element in every interpretation would most likely be that he treated caste-system as a non-issue in nation-building programme and that he aspired for a reformist approach to heal the wound of caste-system rather than a radical approach of annihilation of caste which, he believed, would give way to social chaos. Aloysius’s reading of Nehru as cultural-nationalist historian and equating him with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Savarkar could validly be an interpretation amongst others although requiring closer scrutiny, lest the gap between ‘cultural-nationalism’ and ‘political-nationalism’ be illegitimately filled. Aloysius seems to be oblivious of other passages in the same text (‘Discovery of India’) which would make a ‘political nationalist’ rather than ‘cultural nationalist’ out of Nehru. To quote Nehru from one of such passages from the same text – “There is a tendency on the part of Indian writers, to which I have partly also succumbed, to give selected extracts and quotations from the writings of European scholars in praise of old Indian literature and philosophy. It would be equally easy, indeed much easier, to give other extracts giving an exactly opposite viewpoint” (Nehru, J.L., Discovery of India, Delhi: OUP, 1989, 158). Similarly at another place in the same text, Nehru writes, criticizing Gandhi for his placing an overarching value on the synthetic unity of Hinduism, “Indian culture is neither Hindu, nor Islamic, nor any other, wholly. It is a
fusion of all” (Ibid., 363). This is not to deny the presence of quite a few culturalist and revivalist elements in Nehru’s glorification of Indian past but the larger question to me is that whether Nehru is not an ideal representative of the species called “Left-liberals”? Or for that matter is there not a very thin line between liberal-socialism and liberal-conservatism as it appears in the occasional marriage between English Tory-Conservatism and Labor-Socialism? More precisely, don’t Liberals of all sorts across the nation-states play part-time culturalist and revivalist?

This goes without saying that alternate and antagonistic discoveries of India, challenging the dominant vision of glorified, nationalized Brahminic hierarchy, were attempted from the general subaltern position. Aloysius is of the view that these subaltern visions were not an imperialism-sponsored project and under the concrete, historical circumstances were not only autonomous but by implication a part of a broader anti-imperialist agenda of mass emergence. The subaltern agenda of mass emergence in constructing divergent and antagonistic mythological histories thus challenged the intellectual foundation of colonialism itself. Secondly and most importantly, the subaltern imaginings failed to develop and transform themselves into one grand meta-narrative counter to the dominant vision, and their episodic nature was due to their general position of subalternity. Thus in the face of the colonial-nationalist and oppressive master-paradigm of history and culture, the subaltern search became multi-directional. It included the repudiation of the meta-narrative, attempts to discover a counter meta-narrative, and constructions of differential and separatist pasts. So the obvious terrain of contestation, concludes Aloysius, was the Varna/Caste scheme. While an idealized Varnashrama Dharma was found glorious and worthy of export to all other cultures of the world by Tilak, Vivekananda and Gandhi; on the other hand, Phule, Naicker, Swami Achchutanand and Ambedkar considered the Varna scheme to be a plain and painful anachronism that deserved to be dumped, and if it was found to be an integral part of Hinduism then that Hinduism itself in toto needed to be given up.

Conclusion:

This chapter purports to embark on the delineation of ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism by Ambedkar in the colonial age. After having dealt with the task of defining nationalism per se both in the Western and anti-colonial contexts as well as its peculiar forms of manifestations in the Indian subcontinent in the former two chapters, this chapter has undertaken to put light on Ambedkar’s nationalism which justifiably claimed to represent the so-far unrepresented voice of the subaltern masses. Apart from doing this, it also problematizes the dilemmas and challenges which the ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism encountered in the face of its competing anti-colonial nationalisms. Apparently, as every nationalism aims to reify its ideology into the formation of a kind of state and society, so does the ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism of Ambedkar. This nationalism is not just premised upon a negative value of blindly refuting its contemporaneous versions of anti-colonial nationalism; on the contrary, it seeks to theoretically deconstruct its competing versions and based on this deconstruction, it proposes its own logically interlaced
ideological position on everything like nation, nationalism, modernity, democracy, citizenship, rights, counter-history, economics, state, society and so on.

On the question of nation and nationalism, Ambedkar’s nationalism takes its own normative intermediate position between what it called two extreme utopian positions of Congress-nationalism (India is already a nation!) and Muslim-League nationalism (India can never be a nation!). Ambedkar’s intermediary position was that India was not a nation but it could, cautiously and skillfully, be built into a nation, as India has all the elements required to make a nation out of it but it is time-taking process and a work of art. Similarly, ‘Difference-sensitive’ nationalism, unlike Congress nationalism, rests itself upon the unjust identitarian social structures to carve out a political nation and in doing so, it does not overlook the sensibly-drawn cultural differences of a minority community, gender and subaltern masses. Nor does it plunge so deep into the communitarian discourses of ‘group-rights’ as to dissolve the very organic ties of a nation. Thus Ambedkar’s nationalism is not reflective of a site of tension between ‘real type’ and ‘ideal type’; rather, it seeks to entrench congruence between the former and latter.
ENDNOTE


2. Ibid. pp.143-44.


20. Ibid., p. 169.


22. Ibid., pp. 354-55.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 39.

30. Ibid., 40.

31. Ibid., 45.

32. Ibid., 49.


34. Ibid., 34-5.


41. The Times of India, dated 27th August, 1954.


44. Ibid., pp.340-41.


46. Ibid. pp.95-6.

47. Ibid. pp.75.


49. Ibid. pp. 84.

50. Ibid. pp.43.


53. Zelliot, Eleanor – “From Untouchable to Dalit” (New-Delhi, 1992), pp. 53.


65. Ibid., pp. 78.


67. Ibid., pp. 129.


70. Ibid., pp. 168-9.

71. Ibid., pp.171.


73. Ibid., Vol. II, pp.504.

74. Ibid., Vol. IX. pp. 192-4.


82. Ibid., pp. 174.


85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., pp. 164.