

Exploring Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Idea of Swaraj: A Study of *Pakistan or The Partition of India*¹

Pritom Hatimuria

M.Phil. Scholar

Department of English

University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

Abstract

In the preceding years of India's independence, a significant question that the people of India were grappling with was whether the idea of Swaraj would entail the creation of Pakistan or not. Different political groups and prominent personalities of the Indian nationalist movement looked at this issue from different perspectives. This research paper aims to explore Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's perspective on the idea of Swaraj in relation to the issue of Pakistan. The objective is to investigate how Ambedkar puts forward the idea of Swaraj in his treatise titled *Pakistan or The Partition of India*. Moreover, this paper will also give a comparison between Ambedkar's idea of Swaraj and the idea of Swaraj propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. By doing so, this paper casts light upon how Ambedkar envisaged the idea of Swaraj for India before independence.

Keywords: India's freedom struggle, Pakistan, Swaraj, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

¹ Swaraj is a Hindi word whose literal meaning is self-governance. During India's freedom struggle, the meaning of the word varied according to the context and individual interpretation. In this paper, the word means the complete independence of India.

Introduction

In the freedom struggle of India, a radical shift occurred at the beginning of the 1940s due to the emergence of the demand for Pakistan. Started in 1930 by Muhammad Iqbal, the dream of Pakistan took a full-fledged form at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, when the Muslim League demanded autonomy for the Muslim majority states of India. After the Quit India Movement in 1942, the demand to end the colonial rule in India intensified and in parallel, the Muslim League was labouring to spread the notion of Pakistan among the Muslim people of India. After the failure of the Wavell Plan and the Shimla Conference in 1945, the Quit India resolution was put in the election manifesto of the Congress in the December election of 1945 which helped the party to gain success in non-Muslim constituencies. On the other hand, the Muslim League's victory in the Muslim constituencies in both the General Election of 1945 and the provincial elections of 1946 gave a great boost to the demand for Pakistan which resulted in the partition of India on 15 August 1947. As the issue Pakistan was an integral part of the Indian freedom struggle since the beginning of the 1940s, a significant question that the people of India were grappling with during that time was whether the idea of Swaraj would entail the creation of Pakistan or not and different political groups and prominent personalities of the Indian nationalist movement looked at this issue from different perspectives.

Objective of the Paper

Most of the prior research works done on Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar deal with his writings on the issue of caste. But this research paper aims to explore Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's perspective on the idea of Swaraj in relation to the issue of Pakistan. The objective is to investigate how Ambedkar puts forward the idea of Swaraj in his treatise titled *Pakistan or The Partition of India*.

Methodology

The research paper investigates the proposed objective by giving a detailed analysis of the treatise *Pakistan or The Partition of India*. Moreover, a comparison between Ambedkar's idea of Swaraj and the idea of Swaraj propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar will also be given.

Discussion and Findings

Published in 1945, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's treatise titled *Pakistan or The Partition of India* was written at a time when the demand for complete independence was at its peak and the need to resolve the issue of Pakistan became very necessary. In the Preface to the treatise, Ambedkar mentions that through his work, he tries to give, from his standpoint, "a perfectly accurate, and at the same time, a suggestive picture of the situation" arisen out of the demand for Pakistan (Ambedkar, "Pakistan" x). Throughout the text, although Ambedkar neither accepts nor denies the demand for Pakistan in a crystal clear manner, by analysing different aspects surrounding the issue such as the two-sided approach of accepting and denying the demand and the repercussions of both, different alternatives to Pakistan, the method of achieving it etc. he tries to justify the formation of Pakistan on the "principle of self-determination" (Ambedkar, "Pakistan" xviii). According to Ambedkar, the Hindu nationalists who, on the ground of self-determination, were demanding freedom from a foreign rule could not suppress the Muslims' demand for Pakistan because it was also based on the same principle. Hence, he calls both the demands as "merely two aspects of the struggle for freedom" which should be settled by the Muslims and the Hindus alone (Ambedkar, "Pakistan" xix). According to my interpretation, Ambedkar, by justifying the creation of Pakistan, wanted to achieve a Swaraj for India that would include two elements and these are- democracy and security.

In his speech delivered to the members of the Poona District Law library on 22 December 1952 titled "Conditions Precedent for the Successful Working of Democracy", Ambedkar defines democracy "as a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed" (89). But Ambedkar wants democracy not only in the political sphere, rather his goal is to transform the "political democracy" into "a social democracy" by encompassing "a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life" (Ambedkar "Constituent" 64). In "Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province", a statement submitted to the Linguistic Provinces Commission in 1948, Ambedkar mentions a basic requirement for the proper functioning of democracy which is homogeneity. In the statement, he clearly states that although the linguistic provinces might create the problem of affecting the unity of India, it would provide "what democracy needs, namely, social homogeneity". He further says- "History shows that democracy cannot work in a State where the population is not homogenous. In a heterogeneous population divided into groups which are hostile and anti-social towards one another the working of democracy is bound to give rise to cases of discrimination, neglect, partiality, suppression of the interests of one group at the hands of another group which happens to capture political power". In *Pakistan or The Partition of India*, Ambedkar's justification for the scheme of Pakistan can be interpreted as his attempt to create a less heterogeneous society in Independent India and by doing so, he tried to achieve a fundamental element of democracy which is fraternity.

In the chapter "Break-Up of Unity" in *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, while refuting the Hindu nationalists' argument that the partition was going to destroy the Hindu-Muslim unity, Ambedkar argues that there was no unity between the Hindus and the Muslims that some of the Hindus harped on and he justifies it by giving an analysis from history. He agrees that till the arrival of Hsuan Tsang in India, not only the people of the Northern part of

India but also the people of Afghanistan were either Buddhist or Vedic. But after Hsuan Tsang left, the northern part of India went through a radical cultural and religious change because of the incessant Muslim invasions. The first Muslim invasion was done by the Arabs under the leadership of Mahommad bin Qasim in 711 AD which resulted in the conquest of Sind. Although this invasion could not bring permanent occupation, after its withdrawal, a series of horrible invasions began for more than 760 years. These invasions not only broke the unity between Northern India and the rest of India but also paved the way for the antipathy between the Hindus and the Muslims which had not been decreased by the subsequent political system. So, according to Ambedkar, if "unity is to be an abiding character, it must be founded on a sense of kinship" and by showing Pakistan as "politically detachable from, socially hostile and spiritually alien to, the rest of India", he comments that there is more "spiritual unity between Hindustan and Burma than there is between Pakistan and Hindustan" (Ambedkar, "Pakistan" 48, 49).

In the chapter titled "Must There be Pakistan?", Ambedkar puts forward his disagreement to the Muslims' complaint that Muslims were a minority in India and the rejection of Pakistan would create only Hindu Raj after India's independence by saying that it was the Muslim community which was bestowed upon the maximum safeguards among all the minority groups in India and by creating a joined party between the Hindus and the Muslims, they could easily prevent the Hindu Raj in the future. So, it was the absence of fraternity between the Hindus and the Muslims that resulted in most of the Muslims' complete denial to live with the Hindus. Therefore, Ambedkar preferred the scheme of Pakistan as a part of his vision of Swaraj instead of keeping the Muslims as a minority group with safeguards. Ambedkar's staunch belief in fraternity is reflected in his preference for Buddhism over Marxism in his speech titled "Buddha or Karl Marx" given at the Fourth Conference of the Buddhist World Fellowship on 20 November 1956. By giving a

comparison between Marxism and Buddhism, Ambedkar prefers Buddhism to Marxism because of the presence of "democratic ethos" (Sugunan 33). The process of negotiation of differences in Buddhist vision deals with the "codification of procedures and practices which the partaking stakeholders would abide by in order to settle differences" instead of following "the decisions of the enlightened leader" (Sugunan 33). But according to him, the Marxist model of political action lacks this cordial term and instead, it follows the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, it was due to his belief that without fraternity, "liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things", Ambedkar supported the scheme of Pakistan (Ambedkar "Constituent" 64). Ambedkar thought that it was the achievement of fraternity via creating a less heterogeneous India that could pave the way for Swaraj with democracy.

The second element that Ambedkar wanted to be a part of Swaraj is the security of India and he discusses this aspect in the treatise by giving a hypothetical picture of undivided independent India. While discussing the composition of the Indian army, Ambedkar reveals that according to the data from the report of the Simon Commission, the lion's part of the recruits to the Indian army were from the places included in the scheme of Pakistan and the official explanation given for this was that the people of the North-west belonged to the Martial classes. But by showing the demonstrations given by Mr. Nirad Chaudhuri in his series of articles on "The Martial Races of India", published in *Modern Review* in 1930 and 1931, Ambedkar says that the predominance of the men of the North-West began since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, which was 20 years before the explanation of Martial and Non-martial classes projected in 1879. Therefore, it pertained to, instead of their alleged skill in fighting, their act of providing help to the British to repress the Mutiny. Moreover, Mr. Chaudhuri's report also highlights the difference between the percentage of the Army from the North-West before and after the mutiny. As a consequence of the regular inclusion of the men from the North-West in the army, it became like a family occupation for them. By

calling this artificial division between Martial and Non-Martial Classes as baseless as the Hindu theory of caste, Ambedkar says that there were other eligible communities such as Sikhs, Rajputs, Marathas etc. that could join the Indian army. So the fear that the separation of Pakistan would weaken India's defence power was not true. But according to Ambedkar, the feature of the Indian army which did not get a mention in the Commission and required more serious concern was the “communal composition of the Indian army” (Ambedkar, “Pakistan” 64). Although the Special Army Committee of 1879 accepted and recommended the view that there should not be preponderance of particular one nationality or community in the Indian army, after the Sepoy Mutiny, there was a sudden increase in the number of Muslims in the army which was clandestinely done by the British. Here, Ambedkar provides two probable reasons for this- the Muslims might have proved themselves as better soldiers than the Hindus, or British was using it as a tool to prevent the Hindu nationalist struggle for independence. By hypothetically situating this composition of the Indian army in independent India, Ambedkar says that among India's two foreign invaders that were Russia and Afghanistan, if Afghanistan singly or together with the other Muslim States invaded India, then the Muslims' participation in defending Hindu majority India could not be guaranteed. He further says that the Muslims of the North-West were the most disaffected Muslims vis-a-vis the Hindus and engaged in propagating Pan-Islamism. Moreover, the Indian Muslims who were participating in the Khilafat movement went to the extent of inviting the Amir of Afghanistan to invade India. Hence, by showing a deep suspicion on the loyalty of the Muslims towards India, Ambedkar agrees with Theodore Morrison's view that the Muslims was alone a sufficient obstacle towards establishing an independent government and if the Afghans invaded India, then there was a high chance that the Muslims, instead of joining the Hindus and Sikhs to prevent them, would join the invaders under the allurements of religion and kinship.

Another significant security issue highlighted by Ambedkar is whether the Indian government would be free to use an army that was composed of so many Muslim soldiers because the principle of not fighting against the Muslim powers, which was put forward by the Khilafat Committee, was going to be “the most agreeable to the Muslim sentiment and the League may find a sanction for it” (Ambedkar, “Pakistan” 84). Hence, Ambedkar believed that if the union of India was preferred and the two-nations mentality created by Pakistan continued to thrive, then the Indian government would not be free to use the Indian army and if used, its loyalty could not be assured. Rather, it would make India subordinated with the neighbouring Muslim countries. Consequently, the Swaraj of India would not be complete and hence, to make a safe Indian army, Ambedkar preferred the “Freedom of India to the unity of India” (Ambedkar, “Pakistan” 363).

Ambedkar’s Idea of Swaraj Versus the Idea of Swaraj by V. D. Savarkar: The Hindu nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar accepted the disunity between the Hindus and the Muslims, but he was against the idea of Pakistan and tried to suppress it by coercion. In his presidential address at Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha in Ahmedabad in 1937, Savarkar acknowledged the existence of two nations in India. In the speech, by calling the politicians who thought that there was unity between Hindus and Muslims or India could become a harmonious nation “infantile politicians”, he said that the communal question in India was the result of the age-long hostility and animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims and hence, it was safer to acknowledge this “deep-seated disease” that India was not a “unitarian and homogeneous nation” (13, 14). Rather, there were “two nations in the main; the Hindus and the Moslems, in India” (14). Thus, Savarkar was in agreement with Muhammad Ali Jinnah regarding the two-nations mentality. But unlike Jinnah, Savarkar didn’t want the division of India. Instead, he wanted the two nations to “dwell in one country” and “live under the mantle of one single constitution; that the constitution shall be such that the Hindu nation will

be enabled to occupy a predominant position that is due to it and the Muslim nation made to live in the position of subordinate co-operation with the Hindu nation” (Ambedkar, “Pakistan” 131, 131-132). In the 21st session of Hindu Mahasabha held in Calcutta in 1939, Savarkar defines Swaraj in the following way:

Swarajya to the Hindus must mean only that ‘Rajya’ in which their . . . ‘Hindutva’ can assert itself without being overlorded by any non-Hindu people, whether they be Indian Territorials or extra-territorials:- Some Englishmen are and may continue to be Territorially born Indians. Can, therefore, the overlordship of these Anglo-Indians be a ‘Swarajya’ to the Hindus? Aurangzeb or Tippu were hereditary Indians, nay, were the sons of converted Hindu mothers. Did that mean that the rule of Aurangzeb or Tippu was a ‘Swarajya’ to the Hindus? No! Although they were territorially Indians they proved to be the worst enemies of Hindudom and therefore, a Shivaji, a Gobindsingh, a Pratap or the Peswas had to fight against the Moslems domination and establish a real Hindu Swarajya (45).

Regarding the relationship between minority and majority in independent India, Savarkar said that minority “is to be no justification for privilege and majority is to be no ground for penalty” (Ambedkar, “Pakistan” 132). Besides, as a part of Swaraj, two other aspects that Savarkar was insisting on were- continuation of the name Hindustan as the proper name of India and the retention of Hindi as the national language and Sanskrit as a sacred language. Thus, Savarkar categorically stated that his idea of Swaraj was a Hindu Raj for India.

In acknowledging the disunity between the Hindus and the Muslim, Ambedkar was in agreement with Savarkar. But he differed from Savarkar in two significant aspects: first, he thought that the Muslims were not yet a nation, rather they were a community that possessed

the necessary elements to be a nation, and second, he was totally against the thought of the forceful unity between the Hindus and the Muslims in the idea of Swaraj because it could only pave the way for a lust for domination instead of a democratic structure. Hence, he clearly states:

Swaraj must be a Government of the people by the people and for the people. This is the *raison d'être* of Swaraj and the only justification for Swaraj. If Swaraj is to usher in an era in which the Hindus and the Muslims will be engaged in scheming against each other, the one planning to conquer its rival, why should we have Swaraj and why should the democratic nations allow such a Swaraj to come into existence? It will be a snare, a delusion and a perversion (Ambedkar, "Pakistan" 363)

Conclusion

Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956 because of the presence of democratic ethos in the religion which, according to him, the caste-ridden Hinduism cannot provide the Dalits. But Gauri Viswanathan rightly highlights in the book *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* that Ambedkar's conversion carries a connotation of nationalism. Although Ambedkar embarked on a study of comparative religions after his declaration in 1936 that he would not die as a Hindu, he never thought of Islam and Christianity seriously because the root of these two religions lies outside India. The only other religion that Ambedkar seriously considered was Sikhism because it was in the interest of the country and the "untouchables would not then have to forsake Indian culture if they converted" (Viswanathan 234). In other words, his conversion to Buddhism was also caused because of Buddhism's root in Indian culture. On the other hand, when Ambedkar finally converted to Buddhism, the Hindus were not very much perturbed because Buddhism did not pose any threat to the Hindu majority India as Christianity or Islam would have done. Thus,

Ambedkar was not completely able “to unfasten the link that he believed existed between Hinduism and India” and by choosing a religion that is considered a part of Hinduism, he tried to avoid any suspicion on his loyalty to the nation (Viswanathan 234). Therefore, it can be said that perhaps “it was Ambedkar’s belief in the alien nature of Islam in India, as well as India’s very own genius to divide, that allowed him to argue Indian Muslims were a community with their own destiny rather than a minority in need of protection” (Tejani 119). Consequently, the justification for Pakistan became an integral part of his idea of Swaraj.

References

1. Ambedkar, Dr. B. R. “Conditions Precedent for the Successful Working of Democracy.” *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, edited by Bhagwan Das, vol. 1, Navayana, 2010, pp. 86-102.
2. ---. Constituent Assembly Debates.” Constituent Assembly of India, 25 November, 1949, indiankanoon.org/doc/792941.
3. ---. *Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province*. Statement submitted to the Linguistic Province Commission, 1948, drbacmahad.org/Speeches/maharashtra-as-a-linguistic-province.pdf.
4. ---. *Pakistan or The Partition of India*. Kalpaz Publications, 2017.
5. Savarkar, V D. *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, Poona, <http://savarkar.org/en/pdfs/hindu-rashtra-darshan-en-v002.pdf>.
6. Sugunan, Sreejith. “Ambedkar’s Non-violence.” *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 54, no. 23, 08 June, 2019, pp. 32-34.
7. Tejani, Shabnum. “The Necessary Conditions for Democracy: B R Ambedkar on Nationalism, Minorities and Pakistan.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 50, 2013, pp. 111-119. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24479052.

8. Viswanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Princeton University Press, 1998.